



COVID-19 County Alert System

Updated December 8, 2020

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS COUNTY ALERT

- The number of red counties has more than doubled from the November 23 County Alert, up to 48 from 20 counties. There are 34 orange counties as compared to 42 counties in that last report.
- In accordance with [Executive Order 181](#), individuals in all counties should stay at home between 10pm and 5am unless an exception applies, and many businesses must close at 10pm
- Individuals in all counties should avoid holiday travel, follow guidance for [celebrating winter holidays safely](#), and get the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) when it is available and their turn.
- Institutes of Higher Education should adopt regular testing of students and staff, and students and staff should follow [Safer Holiday Breaks guidance](#)

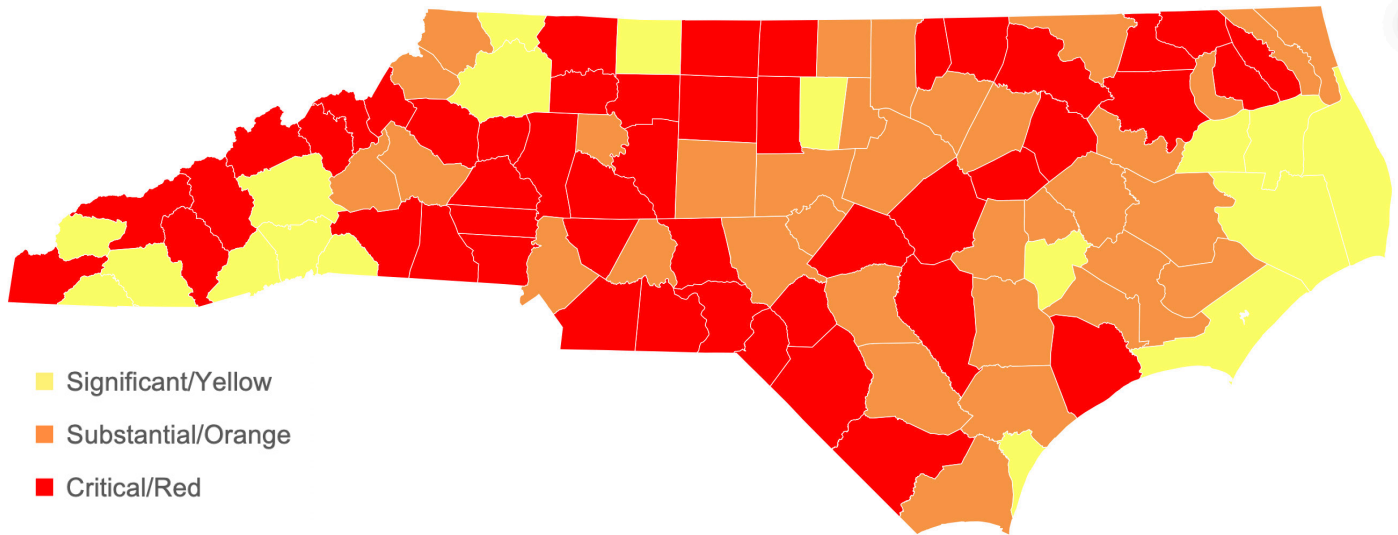
Introduction

North Carolina is experiencing record high numbers in COVID-19 cases reported daily, hospitalizations, and the percent of tests that are positive, indicating very high levels of viral spread across the state. The COVID-19 County Alert System gives individuals, businesses and community organizations, and public officials a tool to understand how their county is faring and to make decisions about actions to take slow the spread of the virus. The COVID-19 County Alert System uses metrics informed by the White House Coronavirus Task Force and North Carolina's key metrics to categorize counties into three tiers:

1. **Yellow:** Significant Community Spread
2. **Orange:** Substantial Community Spread
3. **Red:** Critical Community Spread

Because no one metric provides a complete picture, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses a combination of three metrics: case rate, the percent of tests that are positive, and hospital impact within the county.

NC Counties by Tier: Data from November 21 through December 4, 2020



A complete list of counties and their metrics is listed at the end of the report, including the previous tier and current tier.

County Metrics

The COVID-19 County Alert System uses a combination of metrics to determine whether a county meets criteria to be in the red or orange tier. These metrics provide information about the amount of viral spread and hospital impact in the county.

How Tiers are Determined:

To be assigned to the red or orange tier, a county must meet the threshold for case rate for that tier **AND** the threshold for either percent positive OR hospital impact.

- **Case Rate:** The number of new cases in 14 days per 100,000 people
- **Percent Positive:** The percent of tests that are positive over 14 days
- **Hospital Impact:** A composite score based on the impact that COVID-19 has had on hospitals including percent of COVID-19 hospitalizations, COVID-19 related visits to the Emergency Department, staffed open hospital beds, and critical staffing shortages over 14 days

	Counties must meet:	And meet one of these:	
	Case rate	Percent positive	Hospital Impact within the county*
Critical (Red)	>200/100,000 new cases in 14 days with at least 42 cases in 14 days.	>10%	High Impact on county hospital(s)
Substantial (Orange)	101-200/100,000 new cases in 14 days with at least 21 cases in 14 days.	8-10%	Moderate Impact on county hospital(s)

*Counties without a hospital are assigned the average hospital impact score from the county where the highest percentage of their inpatient hospital admissions occurred.

Counties that do not meet criteria for the red or orange tier are categorized as being in the yellow tier (significant community spread) and should continue to be vigilant to prevent further spread of COVID-19.

Recommended Actions for Individuals, Businesses and Community Organizations, and Public Officials

There are critical actions we can all take to slow the spread of COVID-19, regardless of whether your county is currently in the yellow, orange, or red tier. Individuals, businesses, community organizations, and public officials all have a responsibility to take these recommended actions, in addition to following the requirements in existing [Executive Orders](#) and [NCDHHS guidance](#). Red and orange counties need to do even more to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their communities; it is strongly recommended these counties go further and build upon current requirements as outlined in the recommendations below.

Note: If more than 25% of cases are linked to outbreaks in congregate living settings, different and additional outbreak mitigation steps may be recommended. Congregate living setting outbreaks are often linked to spread in the community through staff who are exposed in the community and bring the virus into the setting or vice versa.



Individual Actions

ALL INDIVIDUALS

- Stay at home between 10pm and 5am, unless an exception applies (in accordance with Executive Order 181)
- Avoid holiday travel and limit physical contact with people who do not live with you
- Get the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) when it is available to you
- Wear a mask at all times outside the home and maintain physical distance from people who do not live in your household
- Follow guidance for [celebrating winter holidays safely](#)
- Download the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#) and share with friends and family; if you test positive, enter your pin into the app to notify close contacts to get tested
- Get a flu shot
- Get [tested](#) if [symptomatic](#) or if you think you have been exposed to COVID-19
- Answer the call and participate in contact tracing
- Avoid large gatherings and crowds
- If you choose to [host or attend a gathering](#), limit attendance to 10 or fewer, host outdoors, and ventilate indoor spaces as much as possible (e.g., keep windows open)

INDIVIDUALS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Individuals in red and orange counties should take the actions listed for All Individuals AND the actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- Limit mixing between households and minimize the number of people in your social circle
- Avoid settings where people congregate, like outdoor bars and night spots (in NC, indoor bars remain closed and indoor night spots must remain below indoor mass gathering limits)
- If patronizing restaurants, consider ordering take out from restaurants and/or eating outdoors socially distanced
- Individuals who are [high-risk for developing serious illness](#) should consider staying at home as much as possible
- Reduce your public interactions to mainly essential activities like going to work or school, caring for family members, buying food, getting health care or picking up medications



Businesses & Community Organization Actions

ALL BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Many businesses close at 10pm, in accordance with Executive Order 181
- Share messages about the importance of wearing a mask and [practicing the 3Ws](#)
- Post [signs about 3Ws at entrances in accordance with executive order](#)
- Provide face coverings to employees and patrons (resource: certain organizations can [request PPE](#))
- Support employees to stay home when sick (resource: [Check My Symptoms](#))
- Strongly encourage all employees download and use the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#)
- Follow [general guidance for businesses and organizations](#) as well as [industry-specific guidance](#)
- Take actions from the [business toolkit](#)
- Community and religious organizations are strongly encouraged to:
 - Hold meetings, events, and/or services online/virtually, or
 - Limit occupancy at indoor meetings, events, or services to ensure social distancing and require face coverings

BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Businesses and community organizations in red and orange counties should take actions listed for All Businesses and Community Organizations AND actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- All businesses are strongly encouraged to implement teleworking the greatest extent possible and cancel any non-essential work travel
- Promote [Find My Testing Place](#) website to employees
- Require all employees to participate in [Count on Me training](#)
- Manufacturing, construction, food processing, farms – request a consultation from NCDHHS on reducing workplace transmission (919-707-5900)
- [Institutes of Higher Education](#)
 - Adopt regular testing of students and staff
 - Adopt strict restrictions on student gatherings and events on-campus and off-campus
 - Close indoor dining and move to grab and go
 - Consider moving to single occupancy dorms or other single occupancy living arrangements
 - [Prepare for the end of the semester](#) and follow guidance for [having safer holiday breaks](#)
- Community and religious organizations should avoid any in-person indoor meetings, events, worship services, or other gatherings above the indoor mass gathering limit



PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN ALL COUNTIES

- Role model and actively [promote 3Ws](#). Always wear a mask when you are with people you do not live with
- Post [signs about the 3Ws](#) in all public buildings
- Work with local media to share messages about the importance of wearing a mask and [practicing the 3Ws](#)
- Have all public employees download and use the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#)

PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Public officials in red and orange counties should take actions listed for Public Officials in All Counties AND actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- Meet with State officials to discuss plans for mitigating spread
- Work with the state to expand availability of [no-cost testing](#) to residents, especially prior to holiday travel
- Work with the state to increase availability of non-congregate housing
- Increase messaging on the risk of serious disease for older individuals and individuals in all age groups with certain underlying medical conditions [identified by CDC](#), and recommend those individuals stay at home as much as possible
- Adopt ordinances that allow for the use of civil penalties for enforcement of the statewide restrictions
- Increase enforcement of mass gathering limits and masks with local law enforcement or other local regulators or inspectors such as the fire marshal
- Consider adopting local ordinances to end alcohol sales for onsite consumption at an earlier time, such as 9pm
- Consider adopting local ordinances with additional restrictions for public facing businesses

State Resources for Counties

The State can provide additional resources to support counties. Public officials from counties that are in the red or orange tier, in coordination with their local health departments, should contact the State to meet to discuss plans for mitigating spread. Our intent is to prioritize resources for counties in red and orange tiers as we make resource allocation decisions.



Prevention communications

- Targeted promotion of prevention campaigns/communications, including to specific sub-populations in the county
- Direct outreach to stakeholder groups through webinars/town halls
- NCDHHS leadership can speak on local media outlets about prevention



Enforcement

- Department of Public Safety outreach to local law enforcement
- NCDHHS to issue warning letters to establishments not complying with the Governor's Executive Order
- NCDHHS Secretary to issue imminent hazard abatement orders to establishments where there is an imminent threat to the public health
- Increased communications to Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE)/Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Commission, and other regulatory groups to enforce



Ramp up testing

- Deploy state and/or federally sponsored testing vendors, if not already present in county, to host community testing events
- Deploy rapid, point-of-care antigen tests for targeted testing
- Assist in identifying additional capacity for specimen processing
- Help county plan local testing event(s), including finding additional local partners to engage



Ramp up support to Local Health Departments

- Surge staff for data entry, case investigation, and contact tracing
- Provide technical assistance on case investigation and contact tracing
- Provide technical assistance on reducing workplace transmission at manufacturing, construction, food processing plants, and farms



Wrap-around services

- Provide technical assistance on setup, funding, and reimbursement for non-congregate sheltering
- Help promote Support Services program (relief payments, food assistance, COVID-19 supplies, transportation, and medication delivery) in counties with services available

Frequently Asked Questions

If my county is in the red or orange tier, what can I do to help my county move out of the red or orange tier?

Individuals, business leaders, community leaders, and public officials all have actions they can take to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community (outlined on page 3 of this report).

How were these metrics selected?

The selected metrics align with the White House Coronavirus Task Force for cases per 100,000 individuals and for percent positive. Hospital stakeholders were consulted on how to best measure the impact of the pandemic on individual hospitals.

What is a case rate and how is it calculated?

To compare counties with different populations to one another, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses a case rate. This is the same case rate measure that the White House Coronavirus Task Force uses to compare counties and states. It shows how many new cases there are per 100,000 people in the county over a 14 day period.

How is percent of tests that are positive determined?

The percent of tests that are positive is the number of positive COVID-19 molecular (PCR) test results divided by the total number of molecular (PCR) test results during the period of interest. This calculation only includes results from laboratories that electronically report both positive and negative results to NCDHHS. Antigen tests are excluded from percent positivity calculations to align with [current CDC definitions used to calculate percent positivity](#).

How is hospital impact measured?

Hospital impact is based on a composite score of four measures:

1. Percent of hospitalizations from COVID-19
2. COVID-19 related visits to the Emergency Department
3. Total number of open beds for which the hospital has people to staff*
4. Critical Staffing Shortages

*Patients cannot be placed in an open bed if there are not the necessary number of staff to provide support.

What if my county doesn't have a hospital or has more than one hospital?

Counties without a hospital are assigned the average hospital impact score from the county where the highest percentage of their inpatient hospital admissions occurred. Counties with multiple hospitals received the average composite score from all the hospitals in the county.

What happens if my county's case rate, percent positive, or hospital impact measures fall into different tiers?

A county must meet the criteria for case rate AND either percent positive or hospital capacity to be in a red or orange tier. For example, if a county meets the orange tier criteria for case rate but meets the red tier criteria for percent positive and hospital impact, then the county will be assigned to the orange tier. Alternatively, if a county meets the red tier criteria for case rate, but meets the orange tier criteria for percent positive and hospital impact, then the county will be assigned to the orange tier.

Frequently Asked Questions (CONTINUED)

Why doesn't the COVID-19 County Alert System use Emergency Department visits for COVID-Like Illness?

Emergency department (ED) visits for COVID-Like Illness are closely tracked at the state and regional level, but are less useful at the county level particularly for counties with smaller populations and fewer ED visits. Instead, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses the numbers of COVID-19 -related ED visits that are directly reported daily by hospitals.

What if my county's case rate is high, but there are only a small number of cases?

Many small counties may have a high case rate, but a relatively small number of cases because the county has a smaller population. To account for this, there is a minimum number of cases that counties must have to be categorized as red or orange (42 cases in last 14 days for red tier; 21 cases in last 14 days for orange tier).

What if a large number of my county's cases are associated with a congregate living setting outbreak?

Congregate living setting outbreaks (including long-term care and correctional facilities) are often linked to spread in the community through staff who are exposed in the community and bring the virus into the setting or vice versa. Cases in congregate living settings are included in the case rate. Different response measures may be needed to mitigate the outbreaks in counties where a large proportion of cases are in congregate living settings.

How often will the COVID-19 County Alert System be updated?

NCDHHS will publish this report every other week.

How can I see how my county is doing after this report is published?

County metrics are published on the NCDHHS public dashboard. You can go to the [NCDHHS COVID-19 dashboard](#) to monitor your county's [case rate](#) and [percent positive](#). County officials can engage with their local hospitals to understand where and how they need support.

What should schools/school districts do if they are in a county that is in the red or orange tier?

School leaders should continue to work with their local health departments to determine the best plan for their district and/or school. Schools may continue to stay open according to plans allowed by the State (as of November 17, elementary schools can open in Plan A and middle and high schools can open in Plan B). Strict adherence to the prevention strategies in the [Strong Schools Toolkit](#) are critically important. Additional information on CDC Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html>

What should counties do if they are in the yellow tier?

All executive orders apply to all North Carolina counties and their residents. Individuals, businesses, community organizations, and public officials in counties in the yellow tier should:

- Follow Executive Orders
- Continue prevention messaging
- Take recommended actions outlined on pages 3-5

Metrics by County

Metrics are based on data from November 21 to December 4, 2020.

* Counties that did meet the case rate threshold, but did not meet the minimum number of cases for the red tier (42 cases) or orange tier (21 cases).

^ Percent Positivity estimates in this table are rounded to the nearest decimal place. Tiers are assigned based on unrounded percent positivity estimates.

County	Current Tier (Updated 12/8/20)	14-day Case Rate Per 100,000	14-day Percent Positive [^]	Hospital Impact	Previous Tier (11/23)
Alamance County	Critical/Red	664.9	10.4%	High Impact	Critical/Red
Alexander County	Critical/Red	864.1	15.1%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Alleghany County	Significant/Yellow	305.3*	8.0%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Anson County	Critical/Red	609.5	10.3%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Ashe County	Substantial/Orange	360.3	6.3%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Avery County	Critical/Red	928.4	20.1%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Beaufort County	Substantial/Orange	444.7	8.1%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Bertie County	Critical/Red	601.7	16.2%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Bladen County	Substantial/Orange	531.8	9.0%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Brunswick County	Substantial/Orange	373.2	8.9%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Buncombe County	Significant/Yellow	333.5	5.4%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Burke County	Substantial/Orange	879.7	8.1%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Cabarrus County	Critical/Red	602.9	10.9%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Caldwell County	Critical/Red	721.6	10.3%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Camden County	Substantial/Orange	303.7*	12.7%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Carteret County	Significant/Yellow	417.4	8.0%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Caswell County	Critical/Red	438.0	10.7%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Catawba County	Critical/Red	829.2	11.2%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Chatham County	Substantial/Orange	255.1	5.5%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Cherokee County	Critical/Red	349.5	10.3%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Chowan County	Substantial/Orange	659.8	7.7%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Clay County	Significant/Yellow	258.2*	3.7%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Cleveland County	Critical/Red	683.0	11.7%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Columbus County	Critical/Red	681.0	11.7%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Craven County	Substantial/Orange	542.4	8.0%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

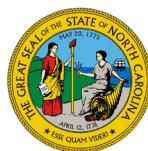
County	Current Tier (Updated 12/8/20)	14-day Case Rate Per 100,000	14-day Percent Positive ^A	Hospital Impact	Previous Tier (11/23)
Cumberland County	Substantial/Orange	379.4	9.6%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Currituck County	Substantial/Orange	342.2	6.6%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Dare County	Significant/Yellow	337.8	7.5%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Davidson County	Critical/Red	590.7	11.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Davie County	Substantial/Orange	620.8	9.5%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Duplin County	Substantial/Orange	446.0	7.5%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Durham County	Substantial/Orange	342.8	5.3%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Edgecombe County	Critical/Red	545.9	10.7%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Forsyth County	Critical/Red	689.8	10.9%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Franklin County	Substantial/Orange	513.7	9.2%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Gaston County	Critical/Red	709.5	12.3%	High Impact	Critical/Red
Gates County	Critical/Red	441.1	14.7%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Graham County	Significant/Yellow	189.6*	2.4%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Granville County	Substantial/Orange	450.0	5.8%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Greene County	Substantial/Orange	545.8	8.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Guilford County	Critical/Red	514.2	8.6%	High Impact	Critical/Red
Halifax County	Critical/Red	583.9	11.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Harnett County	Critical/Red	522.9	11.5%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Haywood County	Critical/Red	616.2	10.1%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Henderson County	Significant/Yellow	326.2	5.4%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Hertford County	Critical/Red	464.6	11.4%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Hoke County	Critical/Red	414.6	12.2%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Hyde County	Significant/Yellow	182.3*	4.7%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Iredell County	Critical/Red	594.0	12.8%	High Impact	Substantial/Orange
Jackson County	Critical/Red	425.6	11.1%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Johnston County	Critical/Red	528.8	10.9%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Jones County	Substantial/Orange	552.1	5.2%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Lee County	Substantial/Orange	411.1	9.1%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Lenoir County	Significant/Yellow	740.0	7.5%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

County	Current Tier (Updated 12/8/20)	14-day Case Rate Per 100,000	14-day Percent Positive [^]	Hospital Impact	Previous Tier (11/23)
Lincoln County	Critical/Red	744.4	11.7%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Macon County	Significant/Yellow	209.2	4.4%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Madison County	Critical/Red	533.2	10.2%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Martin County	Substantial/Orange	574.9	9.0%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
McDowell County	Substantial/Orange	863.3	9.9%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Mecklenburg County	Substantial/Orange	563.6	8.6%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Mitchell County	Critical/Red	755.1	14.7%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Montgomery County	Critical/Red	518.9	13.6%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Moore County	Substantial/Orange	586.8	9.6%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Nash County	Substantial/Orange	509.0	8.7%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
New Hanover County	Significant/Yellow	409.4	7.6%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Northampton County	Substantial/Orange	605.7	9.5%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Onslow County	Critical/Red	553.7	10.2%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Orange County	Significant/Yellow	295.0	2.9%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Pamlico County	Substantial/Orange	447.9	6.0%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Pasquotank County	Critical/Red	354.1	12.0%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Pender County	Substantial/Orange	318.7	8.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Perquimans County	Critical/Red	438.2	13.5%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Person County	Substantial/Orange	511.5	9.9%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Pitt County	Substantial/Orange	641.8	9.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Polk County	Significant/Yellow	308.8	5.7%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Randolph County	Substantial/Orange	610.4	9.1%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Richmond County	Critical/Red	604.5	11.1%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Robeson County	Critical/Red	543.5	11.0%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Rockingham County	Critical/Red	575.8	9.8%	High Impact	Substantial/Orange
Rowan County	Critical/Red	711.5	11.4%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Rutherford County	Critical/Red	820.5	13.9%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

County	Current Tier (Updated 12/8/20)	14-day Case Rate Per 100,000	14-day Percent Positive [^]	Hospital Impact	Previous Tier (11/23)
Sampson County	Critical/Red	657.9	10.3%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Scotland County	Critical/Red	631.8	8.0%	High Impact	Substantial/Orange
Stanly County	Substantial/Orange	625.7	9.1%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Stokes County	Significant/Yellow	572.5	8.0%	Low Impact	Substantial/Orange
Surry County	Critical/Red	632.5	10.1%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Swain County	Critical/Red	399.4	11.9%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Transylvania County	Significant/Yellow	290.8	7.0%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Tyrrell County	Significant/Yellow	149.4*	6.3%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Union County	Critical/Red	567.0	10.7%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Vance County	Critical/Red	819.6	13.8%	Moderate Impact	Critical/Red
Wake County	Substantial/Orange	472.4	6.2%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Warren County	Critical/Red	947.7	13.6%	Moderate Impact	Substantial/Orange
Washington County	Significant/Yellow	336.8*	6.3%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Watauga County	Substantial/Orange	359.6	4.7%	Moderate Impact	Significant/Yellow
Wayne County	Substantial/Orange	534.4	8.1%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow
Wilkes County	Significant/Yellow	630.0	7.2%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Wilson County	Critical/Red	650.4	9.9%	High Impact	Critical/Red
Yadkin County	Critical/Red	921.2	14.7%	Low Impact	Critical/Red
Yancey County	Critical/Red	852.3	11.6%	Low Impact	Significant/Yellow



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