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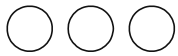
NEWS

# Lamont secures 426,000 COVID tests; hospitals restrict visitors



Christine DeRosa

Updated: Dec. 31, 2021 7:24 p.m.



Governor Ned Lamont speaks at a news conference in New Britain on Friday, after 426,000 COVID-19 tests were delivered overnight.

Christine DeRosa / Hearst Connecticut Media

A day after conceding that his plan to distribute 3 million at-home COVID-19 tests had fallen apart, Gov. [Ned Lamont](#) secured a new shipment for cities and towns, which he said totaled 426,000 tests.

The tests were delivered early Friday from various sources, Lamont said in a press conference from the state's COVID-19 warehouse in New Britain. More were set to come later on Friday.

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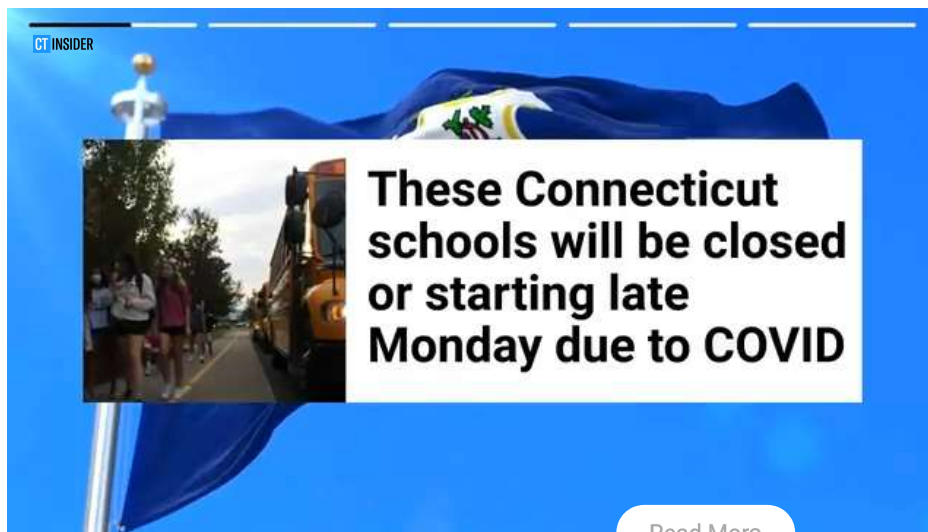
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The exact cost was not immediately revealed, although the administration told Hearst Connecticut Media that the tests cost significantly more than the \$6.18 per test of the initial plan, which totaled \$18.5 million.

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Cities and towns were told they could pick up tests starting Friday night at warehouse in New Britain. The

municipalities had previously planned to hand out the tests on Thursday and Friday to the general public but canceled those efforts when the larger shipment fell through.

Lamont urged cities and towns to give these first tests to those in need as a priority, along with teachers and first responders, but he said they were free to ignore that guidance and hand out the tests as they saw fit.

The state's announcement drew criticism from two advocacy groups for disabled persons — Disability Rights Connecticut and the Connecticut Legal Rights Project.

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The organizations wrote a letter to Lamont “expressing grave concern” and saying that the state “has done nothing to ensure that people who are at high risk, either because of their health status or because they are living in congregate settings such as group homes, inpatient psychiatric hospitals or prisons, have timely access to these limited supplies.”

The groups called on the state to provide a written plan to ensure people with high-risk disabilities be prioritized to receive at-home test kits and N-95 masks, and that those who live in high-risk state-operated or funded institutions or programs will immediately be provided with these supplies.

And in a prepared statement Friday afternoon, Connecticut Republican Party Chairman Ben Proto said the state “has been held hostage by one man's enhanced executive powers and lack of foresight on the Covid testing demand.”

The state plans to have more tests available in the coming weeks. Lamont said he has had multiple conversations with distributors.

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The tests in boxes Friday were from BinaxNOW, not the previously announced iHealth at-home tests. Some of the boxes were also labeled for other states, such as Rhode Island and New York. Lamont said he could not say if they were meant for other states.

“I can tell you that they’re here and I wouldn’t be saying anything about tests unless they were here. We went up the food chain and talked to the most senior people we could. We’ve gotten ourselves to the front of the line,” Lamont said.

Some of the tests delivered Friday were from CVS, which Lamont called a partner in getting tests. It’s not clear whether those tests would have wound up on CVS shelves in Connecticut or other states if Connecticut hadn’t purchased them. CVS Health Corp., based in Rhode Island, owns Aetna, the giant health insurer based in Hartford near the state Capitol.

Major General Francis J. Evon, of the Connecticut National Guard, explained the process briefly at the press conference, stating that tests, masks, sanitizer and any other inventory will go to regional pods or points of distribution for the five regions in the state. Once at the pod, items will be distributed to municipalities.

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## **Schools to remain in-person**

Also Friday, Lamont reiterated that he does not favor allowing the state’s public schools to return to widespread remote learning.

The state has also told the schools that if someone is immune-compromised, someone at home is at risk or if



someone must quarantine, schools are allowed to permit remote learning for those individuals.

“We want everybody back in school,” Lamont said. “We know that there's no compromise with in-person learning. We found a year and a half ago we can do it safely. I believe even now in this omicron day, we'll be able to do that safely as well.”

As of Friday morning, the governor said over 850,000 N95 masks were distributed Thursday and another 890,000 were set to be distributed on Friday, part of an effort to give 6 million of them to state residents and organizations.

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Lamont said he is not planning on bringing back a mask mandate and that he thinks people are doing the right thing and wearing masks more indoors.

“Tonight's New Year's Eve, if you're not with people you know really well, be extraordinarily careful,” Lamont said. “We're suffering a spike that goes back from the early days of the holidays, going back 10 days. I don't want to accelerate that.”

## **Hospitals limiting visitors**

Also Friday, faced with a surge in COVID cases and a test positivity rate that hit 20 percent Thursday, some state hospital systems announced significant restrictions in visitor policies.

The Yale New Haven Health system will restrict visits to laboring mothers-to-be, patients at the end of life, child patients and those with disabilities. Yale's Dr. Thomas Balcezak said at Yale New Haven Hospital, 19 children are admitted with COVID, including five in intensive-care units. That total is higher than last year, he said.

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The system has had a five-fold increase in COVID patients through December, including 285 at Yale New Haven, 131 at Bridgeport Hospital and 51 at Greenwich Hospital. Of those, 76 are in intensive care and 49 are on ventilators.

Hospital staff are “tired and frustrated,” said Yale New Haven Health CEO Marna P. Borgstrom. She said vaccinations and boosters continue to provide significant protection from serious illness.

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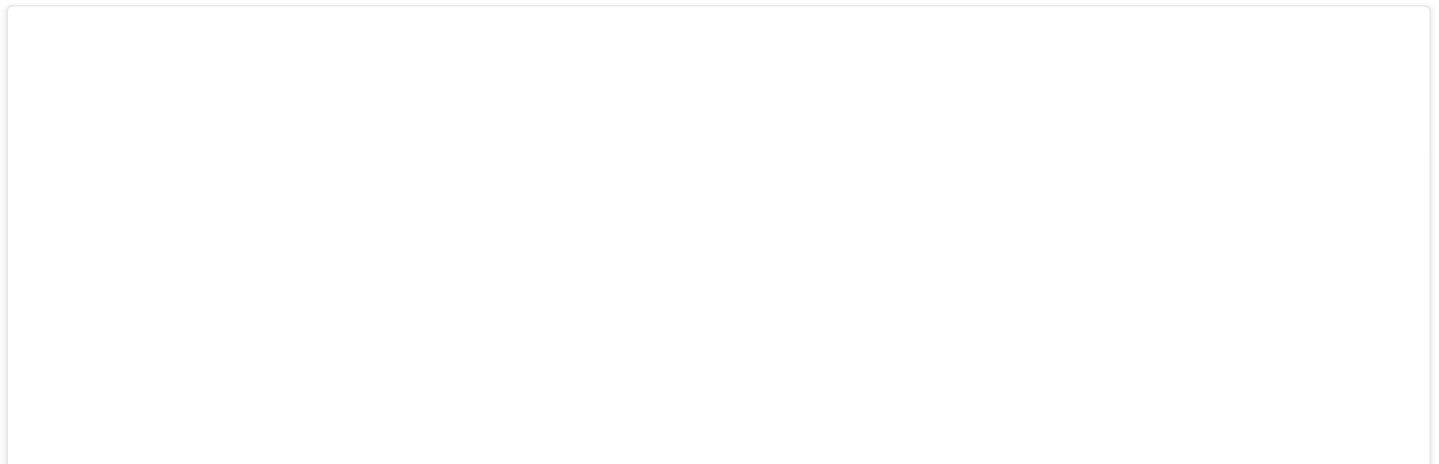
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Nuvance Health also announced visitor restrictions Friday.

“Effective today, visitation at Nuvance Health’s emergency departments is temporarily paused except for extenuating circumstances and special populations,” the health system said in a release.

Nuvance includes Danbury, New Milford, Norwalk and Sharon hospitals.

## **The wild West of tests**

Lamont had hinted about the new shipment of tests at 5 p.m. Thursday in East Hartford, when he admitted his plan to get 500,000 at-home COVID-19 tests kits to state residents before New Year’s Eve was derailed after returning early from a Florida “vacation,” during which he worked every day.

The ill-fated shipment of iHeath tests was through a Glastonbury-based distributor, Jack Rubenstein CT LLC, which, administration officials said, had proven reliable earlier in the pandemic.

Lamont said Friday that the state was told the tests were on the plane, and was even shown photos.

“We know that a plane didn’t take off or it didn’t take off and come to Connecticut as was contracted via our purchase order,” the governor said Friday, calling the international scramble for tests the “wild West.”

In his statement late Friday, GOP Chairman Proto said the shortage “has put everyone's health and safety in jeopardy, called for an investigation of what happened, and said the legislature should end Lamont’s emergency powers.

“Connecticut needs the legislature to act as a co-equal branch of government,” Proto said. “Our elected representatives MUST be looking out for the public's best interest. It's time they stepped up and did their job.”

Initially, the state had promised the tests to towns and cities for distribution to residents as early as Wednesday, but the timetable was pushed back to Thursday and then canceled. When asked whether the state planned to sue the distributor, Lamont said that was unlikely because he’d rather focus on securing and distributing tests.

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Lamont said Thursday that the shipment containing the 500,000 kits was not on the way but other shipments would be, adding that more testing should be available within 72 hours.



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“We had a deal to get those rapid tests. We are not going to get them on the schedule we wanted. There were some severe transportation and logistics issues,” Lamont said Thursday evening. “We have alternative places that are going to start delivering rapid tests as soon as this weekend. We are going to make up for that shortfall fast.”

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*Staff writer Ethan Fry contributed to this story.*

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Reach Christine on

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