



## **U.S. to rejoin U.N. Human Rights Council**

[The Biden Administration has announced that the U.S. will immediately rejoin the U.N. Human Rights Council.](#) The decision reverses a move by the Trump administration to withdraw from the council in 2018 over claims that it focused too much attention on Israel, passing numerous resolutions criticizing the country for abuses against Palestinians. The Trump administration also objected to the membership of China, Cuba, Russia, and Venezuela, all of whom have been accused of human rights violations. The Biden Administration says that it is critical for the U.S. to be involved on the council and to [take a leadership role in protecting the rights of women, LGBTQ+ people, religious minorities, and other vulnerable communities around the world.](#)



## **Biden Administration issues new ICE rules**

[The Biden Administration has released proposed guidance for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) that will lead to fewer arrests and deportations](#) for low-level offenders. The move will also allow for more resources to address national security issues, sex crimes, and gang activities. Under the new policies, ICE agents will have less discretion to unilaterally seek deportations for immigrants convicted of drunk driving, low level drug crimes, theft, and other lower priority offenses. Under the guidelines, ICE will instead focus on national security threats, recent border crossers, and people completing prison and jail terms for aggravated felony convictions.



## **Senate confirms nominee for Secretary for Veterans Affairs**

By a vote of 87-7, [the Senate overwhelmingly approved the confirmation of Denis McDonough as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.](#) President Biden selected McDonough, the former Chief of Staff for President Obama, to oversee the department that has faced criticism in the past. Despite not having any military experience, McDonough said during his confirmation hearing that he understands the sacrifices veterans make and that he would be able to bring more

structure and organization to the department. Tennessee Senator Marsha Blackburn supported McDonough's nomination, but he was opposed by Senator Bill Hagerty.



### **“Let’s Talk” session on voting access scheduled for February 16**

Jim’s staff will host another session of “Let’s Talk: Conversations to Ensure Equitable & Just Policies” next Tuesday, February 16 at 6:00pm CST. The second in the series is entitled: “Tennessee: The 3rd Hardest State to Vote in America.” Register here: <https://forms.gle/Ng22HwMkug62X8xi6>

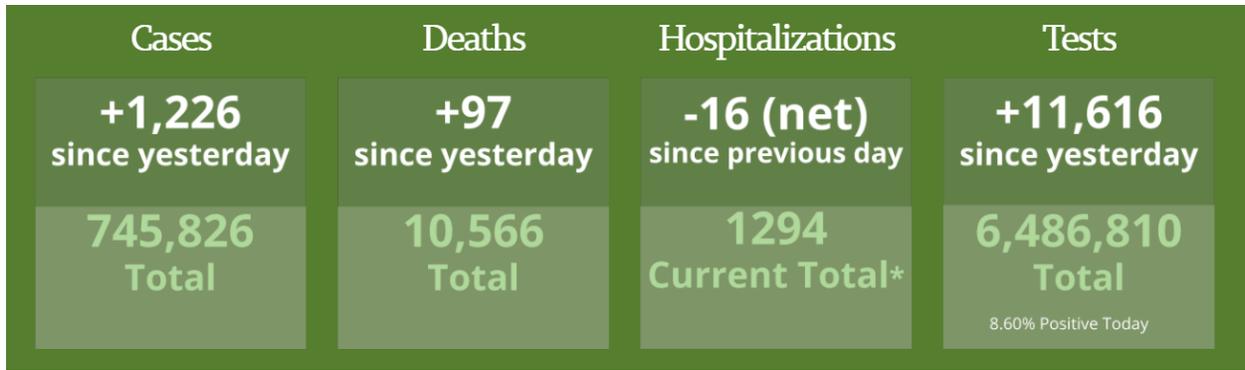


### **U.K. COVID-19 variant spreading quickly in the U.S.**

[The more contagious U.K. variant of COVID-19 is rapidly spreading in the U.S.](#), raising concerns among medical professionals. The number of new cases of the variant (known as B117 strain) is doubling every ten days. [There have been five cases of the U.K. variant confirmed in Tennessee.](#) It is roughly 30 to 40 percent more transmissible than the more common variant and is expected to be the dominant strain of the virus in the country within a month, causing a new surge in cases and more deaths from the variant. There is growing concern that [people who have previously had COVID-19 may not be protected from being infected with the new variant.](#)

### **Confirmed COVID-19 cases, deaths, vaccinations in Tennessee**

Since yesterday, the [Tennessee Department of Health](#) reported 1,226 new cases, bringing the total to 745,826 since yesterday. 10,566 people have died and there are 1,284 people currently hospitalized with the virus. There have been 6,486,810 tests statewide, more than 11,616 since Sunday, with an 8.60% positivity rate. As of today in [Davidson County](#), there have been 86,781 confirmed cases, and 608 total deaths.



As of yesterday, [848,930 vaccinations have been administered in Tennessee](#), which is roughly 8.53% of the state's population. Of all people vaccinated in the state, approximately one third have received a second dose and are fully vaccinated.

To find out your phase and book your appointment for a vaccine visit [covid19.tn.gov](https://covid19.tn.gov) or [covid19.nashville.gov](https://covid19.nashville.gov).



### U.S. will not lift sanctions against Iran

[The Biden Administration announced it will not lift sanctions against Iran until the country comes into compliance with the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal](#) by ending its uranium enrichment program. Under the terms of the 2015 agreement, the U.S. and Western allies agreed to end sanctions that crippled the Iranian economy in exchange for limits on its nuclear program. The Trump administration withdrew from the deal and reimposed sanctions in 2018. Earlier this year, Iran announced that it had restarted its uranium enrichment program, in violation of the terms of the 2015 deal. The Biden Administration plans to reenter the deal once Iran complies with the terms of the agreement.