

The state epidemiologist warned of an increased number of people becoming infected with the coronavirus at church events, funerals and other gatherings as the state's count of virus cases rose Wednesday by 982, the largest one-day increase since Saturday.

The increase on Wednesday comprised 874 infections confirmed through polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests and 108 probable cases, which include those identified through less-sensitive antigen tests.

The state's death toll from the virus, as tracked by the Health Department, rose by 20, to 1,229.

"Today we are again reminded of the serious nature of COVID-19," Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in a statement.

All the deaths added Wednesday were from confirmed cases, bringing the total number of deaths among such cases to 1,080.

"I think this goes to show that we still have continued community spread, and it is not yet going down," state Epidemiologist Jennifer Dillaha said of Wednesday's increase in cases.

She said the spread among college students who returned to campuses last month seems to be going down, but more transmission has been happening at church services, funerals and other gatherings where "the guidelines for social distancing and face coverings are not being followed."

"I think part of it may be that people are tired of the pandemic, and they want to go back to their lives the way it was before the pandemic," Dillaha said.

"Sadly, I think that people are struggling, and they want the contact with other people and the closeness that they feel when they're together, to want that human interaction, and it's very difficult right now to have all that and not spread covid-19."

The number of people hospitalized in the state with covid-19 rose by nine, to 468, as 43 covid-19 patients were newly admitted to hospitals.

The virus patients in the hospital on Wednesday included 90 who were on ventilators, up from 88 a day earlier.

The state's cumulative count of coronavirus cases rose to 77,963, with 75,646 confirmed cases and 2,317 probable ones.

The number of probable and confirmed cases that were considered active rose 194, to 6,777, as 768 Arkansans were newly classified as having recovered.