

The number of covid-19 patients hospitalized in Arkansas fell Wednesday by 66, reaching a level not seen in almost seven weeks, while the number of virus patients on ventilators fell to levels last seen Nov. 21.

The Arkansas Department of Health reported 1,029 hospitalized covid-19 patients. It's the lowest number since the 1,005 covid patients reported on Dec. 10.

The number of covid-19 patients on ventilators and in intensive care units also fell Wednesday. The state had a relatively large increase in deaths, however, with the official toll rising by 52, to 4,742.

After an uptick a day earlier, the recent downward trend in new coronavirus cases in Arkansas returned Wednesday as the state's count of cases rose by 1,777.

That increase was smaller than both the 2,485 cases that were added Tuesday and the 2,520 added the previous Wednesday, Jan. 20.

"There are over 700 fewer new cases and over 2,700 fewer active cases than this time last week," Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in a statement.

"Our vaccine distribution efforts remain a top priority while we gradually receive additional doses. The steps we are taking to slow this virus appear to be having an effect. We cannot relax from following health department guidance."

The number of virus patients who were on ventilators fell for the second straight day, dropping Wednesday by 19, to 157. That was the lowest level for that measure since Nov. 21.

The number of covid-19 patients who were in intensive care as of 2 p.m. fell by 25, to 320.