

Medical flights have gone up in places in Iowa in the past month

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ALERT FEATURED

Medical flights have gone up in places in Iowa in the past month. Have they in North Iowa?

Jared McNett
Dec 18, 2020

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MercyOne Air Med Coordinator Bryan Williams opens the side door to the Air Med helicopter on Wednesday at the MercyOne helipad.

Jared McNett

The past month-and-a-half in North Iowa saw some of the worst days of the **COVID-19 pandemic.**

Within just the past week, **Kossuth County** had the highest weekly positive test rate for patients anywhere in the state.

There were **weeks in counties such as Cerro Gordo where 300 new cases were added** and the positive test rate rose above 25%.

When the month of November began, **MercyOne North Iowa Medical Center confirmed** that it had more COVID-19 patients over that weekend than at any other time up to that point. That increased severity was felt by everyone on staff at the hospital, including MercyOne's flight team.

"The number of COVID patients is much higher than what it was before," Air Med Coordinator Bryan Williams said. "And what we're actually seeing is that some of the normal patients we would transport before aren't coming to the ER now because they're afraid to contract COVID."

According to Williams, who has been on the MercyOne flight team for many years, that shift hasn't affected the overall number of medical flights. There aren't necessarily more flights. Just flights with different people now.

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"(The) types of patients are changing, but numbers are staying the same," Williams said.



Local Mason City business helps out with COVID-19 vaccine storage

Jared McNett

In terms of the day-to-day operations for the flight team, Williams said that the routines haven't changed much. His team of 16, which includes mechanics, pilots and medical crew, still covers a moving range that can go from Mason City to Iowa Falls and 80 miles east to west.

There are can still be days where little happens. And days where everything seems to happen.

What has changed is how personnel have to interact with patients and what equipment they need to wear.

"You've got a lot of the PPE you normally didn't wear," Williams said.

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He did acknowledge that although the daily routine from pre-pandemic to now hasn't been altered a lot, the work can be more stressful at this point. Personnel have to keep vigilant track of that PPE usage and best medical practices.

"There are aspects that are more taxing and stressful," Williams said. "It feels busier because when you're dealing with COVID patients there's a lot more going on."



Cerro Gordo County looking to receive first shipments of Moderna vaccine next week

Jared McNett

According to reporting from KCCI in Des Moines, emergency medical flights tripled there in early November.

For the Lifeflight service, the reporting found that 70% of its flights were for COVID-19 patients. Separate reporting from the Des Moines Register shared that a number of those flights are transfers from smaller hospitals.

The program manager for the Lifeflight service, Michael Zweigart, was quoted in the KCCI story as saying that: "Certainly, the last couple of weeks is the worst we have seen as far as the number of patients."

In that same story, the lead flight paramedic there for MercyOne Air Med, Tyler Hobbs, said that the work now does add stress to the job.

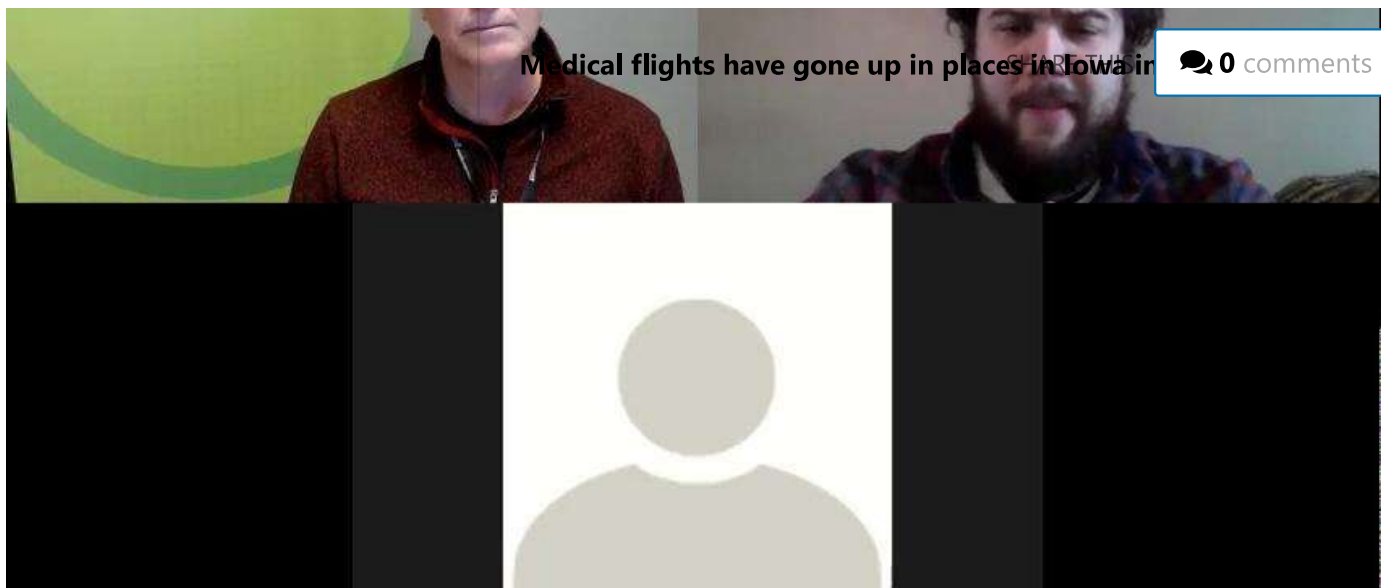


MercyOne North Iowa shares COVID-19 vaccine plans for its workers
Jared McNett

Williams echoed that sentiment.

"Nurses across the spectrum, what it takes to take care of these patients is quite a bit more taxing," he said. "As a nurse, you're always going to have days that are more exhausting."





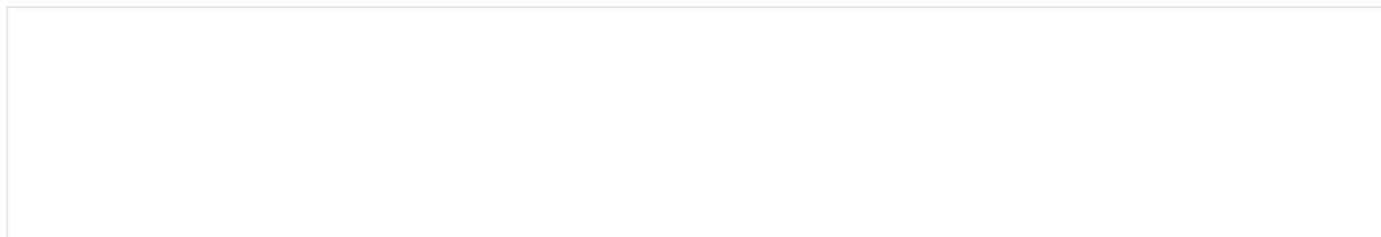
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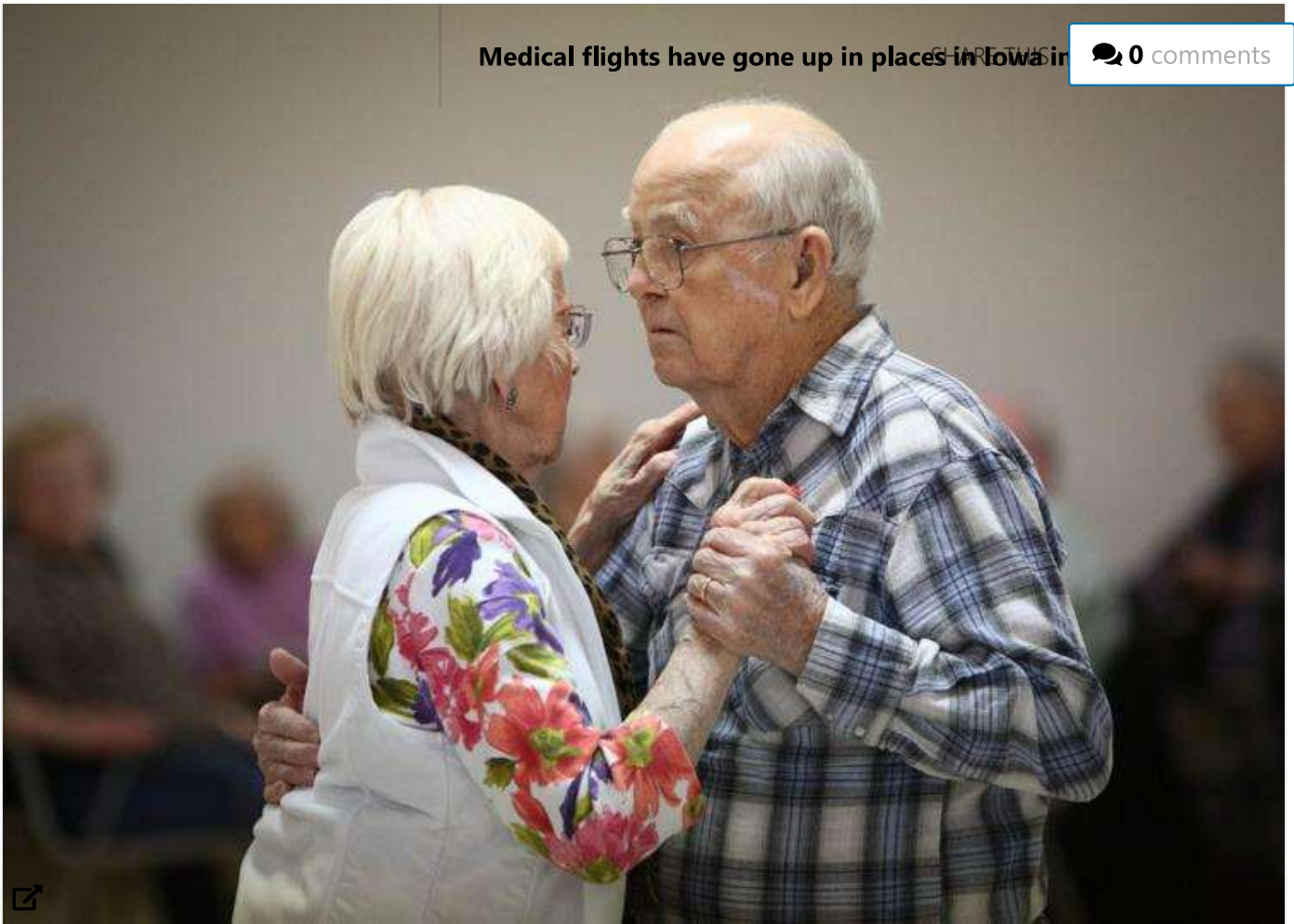


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Jared McNett covers local government for the Globe Gazette. You can reach him at **Jared.McNett@globegazette.com** or by phone at 641-421-0527. Follow Jared on Twitter at @TwoHeadedBoy98.

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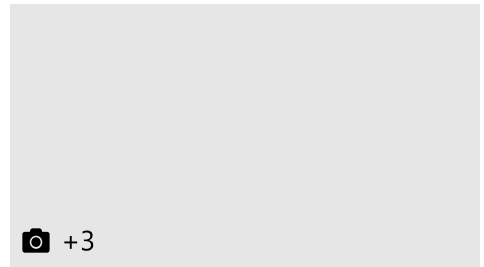
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Reporter

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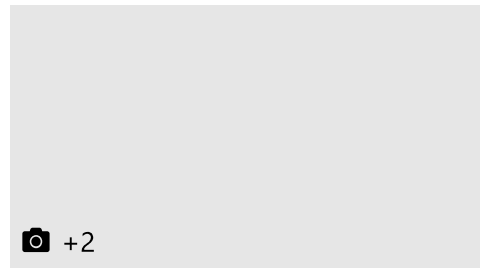
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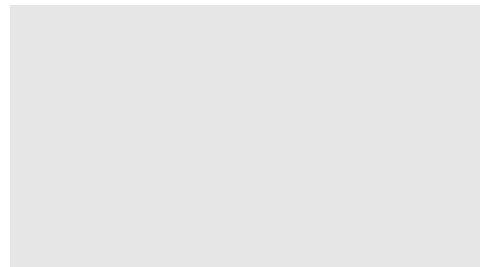
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