

Beat: Entertainment

Strong sales push U.S. Mega Millions jackpot to \$586 million

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USPA News - The Mega Millions jackpot climbed to \$586 million on Monday as lottery fever began to spread across large parts of the United States, and the amount is almost certain to increase even further ahead of Tuesday night's drawing, lottery officials said. The jackpot has rolled over 21 times without a top-prize winner since October 1st, and strong ticket sales for the game could push the jackpot to more than \$600 million before the next drawing.

Mega Millions group lead director Paula Otto said ticket sales over the weekend were "ahead of projections" and indicated the jackpot is likely to be raised again on Tuesday morning. "If we don't have a winner this Tuesday, if we don't have a winner this Friday, we're going to have to buy some new billboards, because our billboards don't go past the billion dollars," Otto told ABC News, indicating there is a chance the jackpot could surpass \$1 billion by Christmas. The current record for the world's largest ever jackpot was \$656 million split by three winning Mega Millions tickets in Illinois, Kansas and Maryland in March 2012. The winning numbers for Friday's \$425 million jackpot were 19, 24, 26, 27, 70 and Mega ball 12. Although no one won the big prize, nine people who matched the first five numbers but not the Mega Ball number were able to claim the \$1 million second-tier prize. Those tickets were sold in Colorado, Connecticut and New Jersey, plus two each in Florida, Michigan and New York. Mega Millions is played in 43 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and ticket sales have increased substantially as the jackpot has continued to increase. Players whose ticket matches all six numbers in Tuesday's drawing will have the option of choosing a pre-tax lump sum cash out of \$316 million or the full prize in 30 annual payments. "The strong sales of Mega Millions tickets mean more than just an exciting jackpot. They mean greater profits to benefit each state in which Mega Millions is played," Otto, who is also the executive director of the Virginia Lottery, said last week. In many states, profits from the lottery are earmarked for education, while other beneficiaries include programs to help the elderly. Recent changes to the game include larger starting jackpots, a million-dollar second prize, and a new matrix of 1 to 75 for the first five numbers and 1 to 15 for the Mega Ball number. The ticket price remains \$1, but the odds of winning the jackpot have fallen from 1 in 175 million to approximately 1 in 259 million. The odds of winning any of the Mega Millions prizes are approximately 1-in-15.

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