

County COVID cases up nine-fold since August

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Daily COVID-19 cases have risen almost nine-fold since August in Cape May County.

Cases were on a slow but steady increase from the end of July through the end of October, but spiked in November.

Over the past week, the county Department of Health reported five new fatalities with 510 active cases in the communities as of Sunday, Nov. 29, another 37 in long-term care, mostly in Ocean City, and another 17 among non-residents.

Reviewing the statistics provided by the Department of Health, there were 978 cases cumulatively

through July 31. That number increased by 139 during August, an average of 4.5 cases a day. It went up another 252 in September, averaging 8.4 new cases a day, and rose another 292 cases in October, an average of 9.4 a day.

Through the first 29 days of November, cases soared in the county by 1,152 — an average of 39.7 per day.

To keep that in perspective, Cape May County, like Salem County, still has among the lowest numbers of total cases and fatalities due to COVID-19 in the state, where counties in the north have seen the biggest impact of the coronavirus.

However, the rise reflects the trends in New Jersey where the state numbers have taken a sharp rise and across the

nation, where COVID-19 infections are soaring.

As of Nov. 29, there have been 2,813 cases of COVID-19 in Cape May County and 105 coronavirus-attributed fatalities, most of them in long-term care. Essex County, by comparison, has had more than 35,000 positive test results and almost 2,000 fatalities.

Statewide Monday, New Jersey's Department of Health reported the total number of cases during the pandemic had risen to

337,304 with 15,164 confirmed deaths and another 1,829 cases probably attributed to COVID-19.

On Nov. 24, a 98-year-old Ocean City man and a 72-year-old Middle Township man died from complications of the virus, according to the county, and on Nov. 24, fatalities were a 97-year-old Ocean City woman and 78-year-old Dennis Township man. A 61-year-old Middle Township man was reported dead from the virus on Nov. 28.

As of Sunday, there were 510 active cases of COVID-19 in Cape May County communities, another 17 among non-residents and 37 in long-term care, 28 of them in Ocean City. Ocean City's long-term care numbers are down; they hit a peak of 42 on Nov. 24.

All 17 non-resident cases were in Cape May. Lower Township had the highest number of active cases at 134, followed by Middle Township with 82, Ocean City with 77 and Upper Township with 51.

Of the 56 new cases in the community reported Sunday, 12 were in Middle Township, 11 in Lower, and six each in Upper and Ocean City. Cape May also reported six new cases.

Active cases include 37 in North Wildwood, 33 in Wildwood, 14 in Wildwood Crest and three in West Wildwood; 18 in Cape May, eight in West Cape May and one in Cape May Point; 27 in Dennis Township, 12 in Sea Isle City, nine in Woodbine, three in Avalon and one in Stone Harbor.

Murphy

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New limits

That said, Murphy said the state is limiting outdoor gatherings to 25 people as of 6 a.m. Monday, Dec. 7. The only exceptions are for religious or political activities, which enjoy Constitutional protection, and funerals, weddings and memorial services.

Outdoor dining is not affected by the new limits.

All indoor youth and adult sports — including practices, competitions and rec leagues — are on “full and complete pause” effective 6 a.m. Saturday through Jan. 2, 2021.

The only exceptions are collegiate and professional level sports.

He noted this aligns with the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) and neighboring states. More than a week ago, the NJSIAA had announced delays in high school athletics until after the start of the new year.

“We do not take this step lightly,” Murphy said, noting he is a huge sports fan.

The first practice for high schools' winter season was going to be for ice hockey on Dec. 14, but that, too, has been pushed back into January.

High school sports begin with basketball practice allowed starting Jan. 11 with competition to begin Jan. 26 and finish by March 6.

Track and field will begin practice alongside

swimming on Feb. 1 with competitions to begin Feb. 16 and end March 27.

Wrestling will no longer be played in early winter. Instead, it will begin practice March 1 with competition from March 16 to April 24.

Girls volleyball follows the same dates as wrestling.

According to the NJSIAA, fans aren't going to be allowed to watch any of the indoor sports in person.

In a press release, the NJSIAA wrote, “Under Executive Order 196, indoor practices and competitions are limited to 10 persons, however, if the number of individuals who are necessary for the practice or competition, such as players, coaches, and referees, is greater than 10 persons, the practice or competition may proceed. If this exception applies, the number of individuals still may not exceed 25 percent of the capacity of the room in which it takes place, or 150 persons, whichever is less. Practically speaking, this means that spectators are prohibited.”

For choirs and caroling, all singing groups should be socially distanced from each other and from audiences. All performers and guests must wear masks.

The state is also discouraging holiday parades. If they do go forth, attendance should be limited and candy and other items should not be thrown to spectators. Live-streaming the parades is preferred so audiences can watch them from home.

those that cross generations, and to limit travel outside of the state. People who travel out of state — except to Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut and Delaware — should quarantine for 14 days.

Christmas tree and menorah lightings should be held outdoors, subject to the new gathering limits. He said the state strongly recommends limiting visits to Santa at indoor locations, saying they should only be made by reservation, with social distancing, wearing masks and not letting children sit on Santa's lap.

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Current COVID stats

With state Health Commissioner Dr. Judy Persichilli quarantining because there was a positive COVID-19 test at the Department of Health, Murphy outlined the latest statewide coronavirus statistics.

As of Sunday night, there were 2,961 patients in hospitals; 263 patients were discharged that day

and replaced by 378 new patients.

There were 26 deaths in hospitals, though not all were confirmed as COVID-related.

There was a statewide positivity rate of 11.34 percent for all tests on Thanksgiving day, he said, and a rate of transmission of 1.11.

Death toll is at 15,164 with another suspected 1,829 coronavirus-related fatalities. There were 15 related deaths reported Monday.

Murphy encouraged everyone to get tested this week, especially if they were at a Thanksgiving gathering. To find a testing site, go to covid19.nj.gov/testing.

The state is stepping up testing for all long-term care residents, staff and visitors.

He noted the state contact tracing is running into non-compliance and that in 69 percent of cases, people are refusing to cooperate. He urged people to help with the contact tracing.

Deeper dive


Today (Wednesday) Murphy said he would be offering a “deeper dive” into the modeling for the second wave of the coronavirus to provide “a better idea of what we are up against.”

He used the characters from “A Christmas Carol” to say it is like the ghosts showing Scrooge not what the future will be, but what it may be “if we give in to pandemic fatigue.”

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