

Stapleton strongly suggests getting a flu shot, as season is expected to be more severe



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The numbers that are most important to me are the death rate – the tragedy of losing some of our fellow residents. That weighs heavily on all of us. That's a number I watch on a daily basis.

We're very happy to report, as of today, we've had no new deaths in the past week.

That's an important number I look at.

The other number I look at is the capacity of the hospitals. I talked to one of our hospital CEOs just this morning. We want to be able to know where the hospitalization rates are, and what capacity is available. Because if you remember, on day one with the pandemic, we talked about our goal was to make sure that the hospitals weren't overwhelmed – that there was capacity at the local hospitals for people to be able to be seen for any number of illnesses. Not just COVID, but, of course, all the other illnesses that people get and experience on a regular basis.

The hospitals were never overrun. We got low on capacity available. Absolutely. There's no doubt about that. But that's the numbers I look at. And our capacity, if you looked at our most recent report, Eastern Niagara Hospital is 72% (of beds available); Niagara Falls Memorial: 46%; Mount St. Mary's: 13%.

I look back to the days when we had very little capacity at our local hospitals. That's changed significantly. And so, I see that as a major improvement. I look at the amount of our fellow residents that we lose

to COVID. That number is much better than it's been.

Those are the numbers I look at, because they really mean the most to us, and they're the ones I can get firsthand information right from the hospitals. I talk to the hospital CEOs on a regular basis. I talked to one this morning. I met with two last week. So, to be able to have those kinds of partnerships with the hospital and the leader of the hospital is key, because we wanted to make sure those hospitals were never overwhelmed.

And thankfully, while capacity was stretched, it was never zero. When you put all the hospitals together, we never had run out of hospital beds. It was getting tight. But we never completely ran out.

Q: What are some tips, or some best practices, we can employ for this fall and winter?

Dan Stapleton: I've been leading this department for over 15 years now. I've been with the department for 25 years. And what I've always said is it's too late to build a partnership when you're in the middle of a crisis. You need to have those partnerships built, strengthened, before you call on one of your partners for help.

We've always had strong partnerships with our hospitals. That's important. We've worked very, very closely with the superintendents of every one of the local school districts. While we have relationships with them and their nurses, we really strengthened that relationship during this pandemic.

More from Niagara County Department of Health

- Website: www.niagaracounty.com/health
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/niagaracounty-health/>
- By phone: 716-439-7435

Additional Resources:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, coronavirus page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>
- National Institutes for Health, <https://www.nih.gov/>



Partnerships with people like yourself, the media. I had relationships before this pandemic started, and that's really when you need it. So, those things have always served us very well.

We just had a meeting just a week ago with a lot of these stakeholders from the local health care organizations, and partners, hospitals, schools, not-for-profit health organizations. We met with all those individuals just last Monday of last week, to go over what are some of our priorities, and to rebuild those relationships. When we had this meeting last week, I said to the group, 50 or 60 people who attended, that, although we want to continue to strengthen relationships that we have with these organizations, we also want to introduce these not-for-profits to the hospitals, to the schools, to each other – to strengthen their relationships, their partnerships, as well.

Partnerships are a big part of it. I could not have led this effort at the pandemic without my partners like Jonathan Schultz from emergency management; without Mike Filicetti, the sheriff, with his office; public works; mental health;

the chairwoman of the legislature, Becky Wydysh, was so supportive of us. Those things are really what you need when you're put in this situation. The partnerships, from the drive-in, to the Kenan Center and all the other schools, those things really are what helped us get through it.

We'll continue to build and nurture those relationships, because that's what got us through so far.

Q: What's the best place, or places, for people to find more information or resources?

Dan Stapleton: Our website is filled with information on COVID, on vaccinations, on monkey pox, on the flu season. Of course, our website; our Facebook page is very active. We just started up with Instagram to get that going, as well.

Have your trusted sources. By that, I mean have your CDC; have your New York State Department of Health, but also have your Niagara County Department of Health be a resource. We know our communities better than anyone else. I think we're better equipped to serve our communities than any anybody else.

The seasonal flu season is upon

us now. There's a very good supply of seasonal flu vaccine available, whether it's through us, whether it's through your pharmacy, whether it's through your doctor.

But this year is supposed to be one of the most aggressive flu seasons we've had in a long time – in years and years. We see what Australia does. Australia is a good sign; they get their flu season before us; and then we can see kind of what are the strains of the flu. How active is the flu; how aggressive.

All evidence is pointing to this is going to be a very, very aggressive flu season. So, we tell people there's no time to wait. Get your flu shot today. It's not too early.

Get your flu shot and your COVID. Whether it's your first, initial COVID shot, or whether it's your boosters. Those are available – and there is no need to separate out the dates of receiving your seasonal flu shot and your COVID shot. It can be done the exact same visit. There's no negative impact by getting them the same day.

So, I'm telling people don't think that the COVID vaccine is going to prevent you from getting the seasonal flu – two different viruses, two different vaccines. And now's the time. And I really hope people don't wait, because it's not something you want to play with.

Q: That's interesting – I was going to ask if you could get them at the same time. So, they play nice with each other, is what you're saying?

Dan Stapleton: Yeah. Actually, they'll do one in each arm. That's what they do.

The studies have shown that they do not impact each other. The effectiveness remains strong.

And I tell people, when it comes to the seasonal flu shot, that strengthens your immune system. That allows you to fight off a number of challenges to your immune system that happen throughout the year, but especially the flu virus.

There's really no reason to wait – and you can get both at the same visit.

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