

# Niagara County doing well combatting COVID; flu protection strongly suggested

I must admit, I was a little taken aback by the hullabaloo caused by President Biden saying the pandemic is over in a "60 Minutes" interview, and then his staff's attempt to almost immediately try to walk-back those comments. The honest fact of the matter is that most Americans believe the pandemic has been over for a while now, and have gone about living their lives in the matter they see fit – be it going back to business as usual or deciding to continue with some measure of COVID mitigation. But the important point is that it has now become a matter of personal choice and responsibility.

I had a conversation with the Niagara County Public Health Dan Stapleton on this topic. Dan looked at it two ways. The official designation of a pandemic is something that comes from the CDC and international health



Becky Wydysz  
Chairwoman

organizations, so in that regard, the pandemic has not been declared over. However, in words and in actions, he said it is pretty clear we have moved from the pandemic stage to endemic. As a quick reminder, endemic essentially means COVID-19 is here to stay, just like the flu or other ailments. But it is much less fearsome now, and with both vaccines and therapeutics available, it is much more manageable.

The data further underscores this point. The metric that is used to track COVID is number of positive cases per 100,000 population over a running seven-day average. For the last several months, we have been remarkably consistent within a range of 12-18 cases per 100,000 residents. Now, clearly, most of the positive cases are not being reported, as people are using home test kits. However, these

numbers are very useful to look at the trend lines, and in that regard, the line is pretty straight.

Perhaps more important are the data points of hospital capacity and deaths. Every life we have lost to COVID-19 is tragic, and I never want to minimize that fact. That is why I am so very thankful that we have had no new deaths over the last few weeks and, overall, very few this summer. Our hospital capacity, according to state reports, has never been in jeopardy. (I'm sure we all remember about flattening the curve to avoid overrunning our hospitals.) Indeed, Director Stapleton is in regular contact with the heads of all Niagara County hospitals, and we do not have any issues. Again, these metrics show tremendous consistency.

So, where do we go from here? There has been much attention on the release of the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine. The FDA has authorized an updated COVID-19 booster that offers

improved protection against recent variants. The new booster is bivalent, as it provides better protection against both the original strain of COVID-19 and the omicron variants that are currently causing most infections (BA.4 and BA.5) Anyone who has not had any type of COVID vaccine, be it the original series or a booster dose, within the last two months is eligible. The Niagara County Department of Health is holding events, and pharmacies have doses, as well. You can go to niagaracounty.com and click on COVID-19 vaccine info and see the schedule of upcoming events. Finding the bivalent vaccine should not be difficult.

One last point that was stressed by Director Stapleton is that there is great worry that the flu will come roaring back this season. Health care professionals look to Australia and other Southern Hemisphere countries as a guidepost for what our own flu season will

look like and, over the years, it has been remarkably predictive. Their season starts before ours and is now beginning to conclude, so we get a sneak peek. Based on that, experts are extremely concerned about what we are seeing. The flu season started earlier than usual, which is a bad sign, and has been hitting children especially hard. That why it is recommended that everyone should strongly consider getting a flu shot. It can be safely done in tandem with COVID vaccines for those who want to get both done at the same time.

As we have stated for some time now, each person needs to make the best choice available for themselves and their families, and by extension, the community at-large. We have the tools at the ready to mitigate the risk of both COVID-19 and the flu for our residents. I urge you to utilize them.

# FASNY offers lifesaving fire safety tips for Fire Prevention Week

Practice escape routes now to save lives later

*'Fire won't wait. Plan your escape.'*  
Guest Editorial by The Firefighters Association of the State of New York

If your fire alarm were to go off right now, would you know what to do or where to go? What if you were stuck in the dark? What about your family and roommates? In the event of a house fire, you may have as little as two minutes to safely escape before smoke eclipses your vision. It is critical to practice escape routes ahead of time, so you will know what to do in an emergency, rather than allowing the panic of the situation to become the difference between life and death.

In support of Fire Prevention Month and Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 9-15), The Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY) urges New Yorkers to develop and rehearse an escape strategy to stay prepared in the event of an emergency. Knowing your exits is especially important if a family is renting or visiting a home they may be unfamiliar with.

"It's critical to plan and practice a home fire escape route. Everyone needs to be prepared in advance, so that they know what to do when the smoke alarm sounds. Every home is different, so every home fire escape plan will also be different," said Ed Tase, president of the Firefighters Association of the State of New York. "Have a plan that accommodates everyone in the home. Children, older adults and people with disabilities may need assistance to wake up and get out. Make sure that someone will know how to help them!"

A key part of every escape plan is to have a single rendezvous point that all people in the structure go to.

Escape plans are not the only thing that residents should do to prepare for emergencies – checking that smoke alarms are operating properly is also essen-



tial. Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors can give residents critical time to escape a home during an emergency. According to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA), three out of every five home fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms or in homes lacking smoke detectors. New York has the third-most home fire fatalities in the country this year, closely behind Pennsylvania and Texas. More than 80% of fire-related casualties in New York are a result of residential fires, compared to the nationwide average of 76%.

"Having an effective escape plan is tied to having working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors," Tase said. "Smoke detectors are the first line of defense during a home fire. We urge all New Yorkers to ensure their homes, and any homes they are visiting or renting, have functional smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms."

To find out more about Fire Prevention Week programs and activities in New York, visit www.fasny.com. For more information about Fire Prevention Week and fire prevention in general, visit fpw.org and sparky.org.

### FASNY Fire Escape Planning Tips

- ✓ Make sure your plan meets the needs of all your family members, including those with sensory or physical disabilities.
- ✓ Smoke alarms should be installed inside every sleeping room, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level

of your home. Smoke alarms should be interconnected so when one sounds, they all sound.

✓ If possible, know at least two ways out of every room. Make sure all doors and windows open easily.

✓ Have an outside meeting place a safe distance from your home where everyone should meet.

✓ Practice your home fire drill at least twice a year with everyone in the household, including guests. Practice at least once during the day and at night.

### About FASNY

Founded in 1872, the Firefight-

ers Association of the State of New York represents the interests of the more than 85,000 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel in New York state. For more information, visit [www.fasny.com](http://www.fasny.com).

Prevention Week was established to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire, the tragic 1871 conflagration that killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. The fire began on Oct. 8, but continued into and did most of its damage on Oct. 9, 1871. For more information, visit [www.NFPA.org](http://www.NFPA.org).

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