

COVID-19: Cuomo raising WNY caution flag; adds caveat to college reopening

More than 100 new cases reported in WNY for first time since May

Team to open free rapid testing sites with results in 15 minutes; 8 temporary testing sites throughout region open Saturday

Speaking to the press on Thursday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said, New York state's rate of positive coronavirus tests has been less than 1% for 20 straight days.

"We're closely monitoring the state's COVID-19 data every day, and the continued 20-day streak with an infection rate below 1% is good news," Cuomo said.

The news is not as good in Western New York, which once again has the state's highest rate of positive infections, at 2%. Erie County reported 79 new COVID-19 cases, while Chautauqua County had 30 on Wednesday.

"Western New York, we have a caution flag out and we're going to fly it a little higher today," Cuomo said. "The infection rate in Western New York was 2%, so that's not good news, and we're going to deploy a 'SWAT team' from the Department of Health that are going to do additional testing at eight sites. Three in the City of Buffalo, one in Niagara Falls, one in Lockport, one in Williamsville, one in West Seneca, one in Dunkirk - with what are called the Abbott testing machines at these sites, which will get same-day results. Literally, within an hour. People will have to make an appointment, but we are focusing on Western New York and we're going to continue to focus on it."

More Details

A press release further explained the "SWAT team" will open free rapid testing sites across the region in partnership with Kaleida Health, Erie County Medical Center and Catholic Health. Eight new testing sites will start Saturday, Aug. 29. Each will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday through Wednesday. All residents are eligible for tests. Appointments can be made by calling 1-833-NYSTRNG (1-833-697-8764).

New York state will deploy 50 rapid testing machines to support the effort and will deploy more as

REGION	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Capital Region	1.4%	0.5%	1.1%
Central New York	0.8%	0.6%	1.4%
Finger Lakes	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%
Long Island	1.1%	0.9%	0.6%
Mid-Hudson	1.0%	0.9%	1.2%
Mohawk Valley	0.8%	0.2%	0.4%
New York City	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%
North Country	0.5%	0.6%	1.2%
Southern Tier	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Western New York	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%

Of the 83,437 test results reported to New York state on Wednesday, 791 (0.95%) were positive. Western New York was at 2%.

needed. All tests are free of charge and the results will support the contact tracing efforts being conducted to monitor and control the virus spread.

Western New York's rate of positive COVID-19 tests has been above 1% for nine straight days. The region's daily average number of new cases is now 70 cases per day, the highest since mid-June. It is driven, in part, by clusters, including a food processing plant in Chautauqua County that has been tied to 53 cases to date; but there is also evidence of community spread, which this testing effort is designed to help detect and control.

Kaleida Health President and CEO Jody Lomeo said, "This is a great example of collaboration and working together to help the community when it is in need. The governor's leadership and initiative to bring rapid testing here this weekend is important from a public health standpoint. With the increase in positive COVID-19 cases across Western New York, it is incumbent upon us - the health system, our government and the community - to come together and help find a solution. Collectively, we all need to continue to do all that we can to expand testing and ensuring access in the community for anyone who wants or needs to get tested."

Erie County Medical Center Corp. President and CEO Thom-

as J. Quatroche Jr., Ph.D., said, "ECMC is very appreciative of Gov. Cuomo's leadership and commitment to the health and safety of the residents of Western New York and our frontline workers. Our dedicated and experienced caregivers are ready to support the activation of the state's rapid test sites, which will provide us with valuable information on the spread of the COVID-19 virus. With our partners at Kaleida Health and other health care providers, we ask our fellow citizens to continue to adhere to vitally important precautions like masking, social distancing and hand hygiene to ensure we protect our family, friends and neighbors."

Catholic Health President and CEO Mark Sullivan said, "New York's ability to effectively test and contact trace depends on close collaboration between the state and its hospitals, and we are proud to partner with Gov. Cuomo in this latest effort to address a spike in Western New York's rate of positive COVID-19 tests. Together we will use our shared resources to provide free rapid COVID testing in more places so we can continue to slow the spread and save lives in the region."

School Reopening

Cuomo said, "We have colleges that are reopening. We're seeing around the country situations where colleges reopen and then have an outbreak of cases. We're

The eight new testing sites include:

- Delavan-Grider Community Center**
877 E. Delavan Ave., Buffalo
- True Bethel Baptist Church**
907 E. Ferry St., Buffalo
- Northwest Buffalo Community Center**
155 Lawn Ave., Buffalo
- Dunkirk Fire Murphy Training Grounds**
665 Brigham Road
- SUNY ECC North**
6205 Main St., Williamsville
- Vigilant Fire Hall**
666 Main St., West Seneca
- John A. Duke Senior Center**
1201 Hyde Park Blvd., Niagara Falls
- YWCA of the Niagara Frontier**
32 Cottage St., Lockport

going to set a threshold that says if a college has 100 cases or a number of cases equal to 5% of their population or more - whichever is less - they must go to remote learning for two weeks; at which time we will reassess the situation. Let me say that one more time, because it's a little confusing: 100 cases or 5%. Whichever is less. The 5% is the population that are on-site: students and faculty. They must go to remote learning for two weeks and then we'll reassess in consultation with the local health department.

"We should anticipate clusters. When you have large congregations of people, anticipate a cluster. We know that. Also, that's what we're seeing. You see it around the country. Be prepared for it, get ahead of it. Be prepared for it, get ahead of it. It's what I say to my team five times a day. So, we expect it. We want to be prepared for it. And that's a threshold that we're going to put in place."

Here, too, a press release offered further guidance:

"Schools must return to remote learning with limited on-campus activity when that threshold is reached for a two-week period. If after two weeks, the local health department finds the college has demonstrated that it cannot contain the number of cases, then they could continue to require remote learning, or impose other mitigation measures in consultation with the State Department

of Health. During that time, athletic activities and other extracurricular activities must be suspended, and dining hall options must move to take-out only.

"If clusters of positive cases emerge on particular areas of a campus while still below 5% or under 100 students, but strain the college's ability to isolate and contact trace, the college must return to 100% distance learning with limited on-campus activity. The local department of health or State Department of Health may order colleges to suspend on-campus activities upon a finding of the college's inability to control the outbreak, even under the metric."

With regard to high school sports, the governor said, "We made a state determination that would allow certain high school sports to commence and we put out guidance and deadlines on that. That does not mean that high school sports must commence. It means they can commence. Can, not must. It's up to the individual school districts to determine if they want to go ahead with a sports program. Different school districts are making different decisions, and that's fine; it's up to them. But we gave guidance as to those that decide to go forward, this is how you should do it."

NFMMC invites COVID-19 community testing requests, updates test schedule

Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center is accepting requests to perform community-based diagnostic testing for COVID-19.

Community testing, which resumed Aug. 14 after a nearly five-week pause caused by a shortage of test supplies, is supported by \$50,000 in Community Development Block Grant funding approved earlier this month by the City Council at Mayor Robert Restaino's request.

Testing is performed by mobile teams from the medical center.

Churches, employers, community groups and other organizations seeking this testing are encouraged to call Sheila Kee at 716-278-4301 for information.

NFMMC also has updated its testing schedule to add new dates:

- Aug. 28: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Cataract Elementary School, 6431 Girard Ave.
 - Aug. 29: 1-4 p.m., Niagara Falls High School, 4455 Porter Road
 - Sept. 4: 1-4 p.m., Wrobel Towers, 800 Niagara Ave.
 - Sept. 15: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Community Missions, 1134 Cleveland Ave.
 - Sept. 16: 2-5 p.m., Bethany Baptist Church, 2002 Forest Ave.
- Preregistration is highly recommended. Call 278-4496.

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