

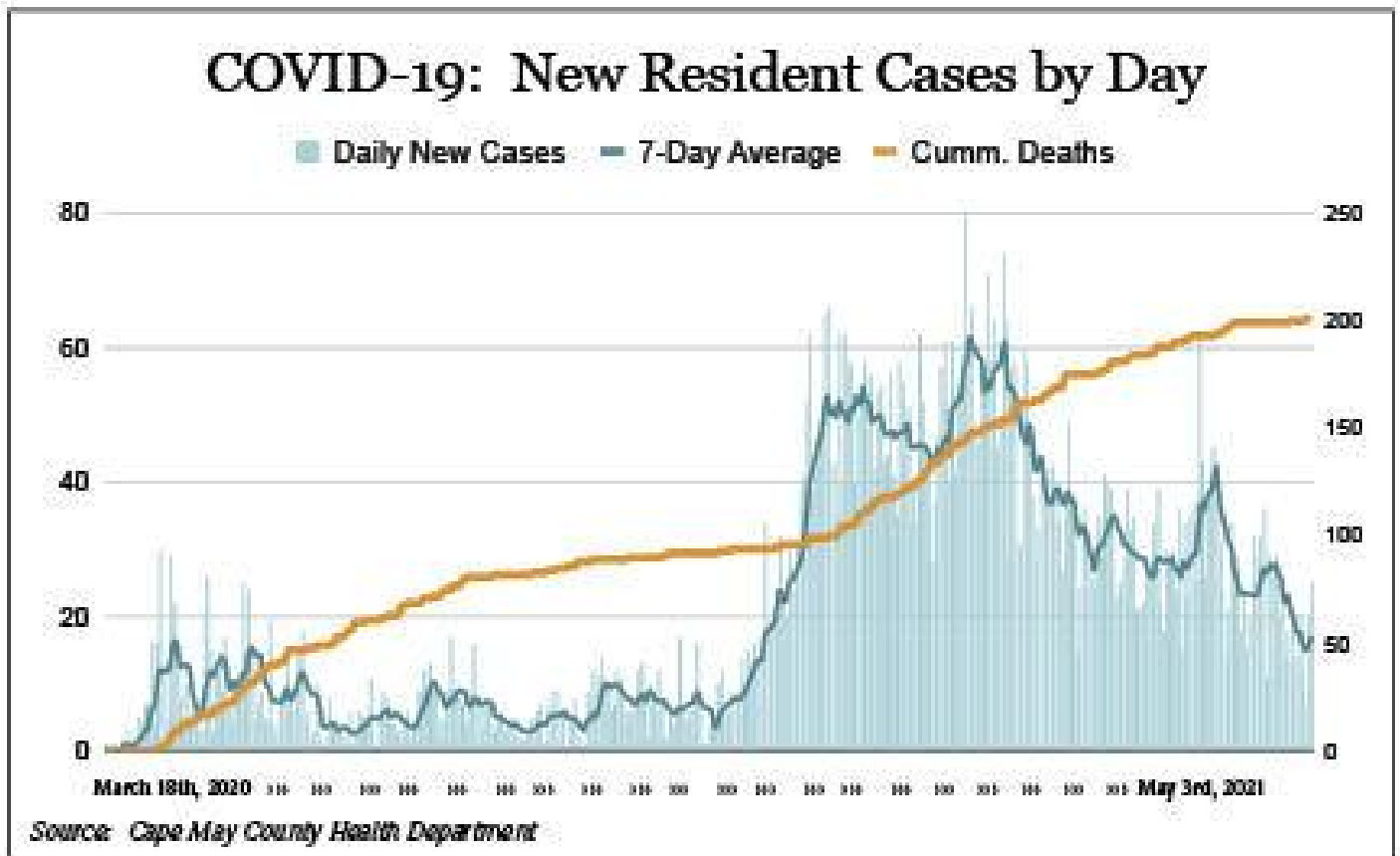
EDITOR'S PICK

Analysis

Covid Update: Case Count Decline Continues; Vaccinations Slow

By Vince Conti

May 4, 2021



To access the Herald's local coronavirus/COVID-19 coverage, [click here](#).

COURT HOUSE - The Covid numbers continue improving, but that may not be all good. Improvements in caseloads, relaxation of restrictions, and declining mortalities are trends long desired by health officials and the public. Yet, they may increase the number of individuals who oppose vaccinations or are simply procrastinators, losing sight of why it matters.

Numbers

For three days running, Cape May County had an active case count below 200. It stands at 186, as of May 3. These are the first days in 2021 when the active case count reached this level. One month ago, the active count was 407.

The county lost one resident, a Middle Township woman, to the virus this week (April 27-May 3). The long-term care facilities across the county have one active case.

There were 119 new cases this week, an average of 17 per day. The county has not had that low of a daily average of new cases since October 2020.

On the vaccine front, progress continues. State records report 48,807 individuals in the county received at least one shot, with 39,990 fully vaccinated.

The 18-plus population of the county, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is 76,392. Another group of over 8,000 individuals had one shot.

Many communities across the nation would be envious of this success, yet the county is not where health officials say it needs to be on vaccinations, and the pace is slowing.

Each week through April and into May, the county saw a slowing in the growth of the fully vaccinated pool of individuals.

Some argue that those anxious to get the vaccine received it. The county may be in the home stretch, with some remaining groups characterized by indifference, opposition, or a reluctance to take a risk that they feel may no longer be needed.

Stockton Poll

Stockton University's William Hughes Center for Public Policy released poll results March 11, suggesting near 30% of those surveyed said they would probably not or definitely would not be vaccinated.

The divide between those who embraced the vaccine and those who were reluctant or opposed to it correlated strongly with political affinity.

For those wishing to pick up the vaccination pace, the result from the poll could be a problem in a strongly Republican-leaning county. The poll showed that 52% of those who self-identified as Republicans were in the groups either hesitant or opposed to inoculation.

In the county, the arguments used to urge vaccination are as much about the collective economy as they are about personal health decisions.

County Commissioner Director Gerald Thornton urged county residents to get the vaccine as “the best way to keep yourself safe and get our businesses open.”

Commissioner Jeffrey Pierson spoke to those who might be “on the fence about getting the vaccine.” He hoped “they see cases dropping, businesses opening, and realize getting the shot will help us get to the finish line.”

Variants

Health officials tried to reach those hesitant about vaccination by framing the issue as something more than a choice about individual risk. The argument is that a high level of vaccinated individuals is the best defense against the virus’s ability to mutate and potentially create variants that could impair vaccine immunity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has three classifications for variants of the coronavirus that causes Covid.

The first is variants of interest – variants with the potential to affect the transmission, diagnostic testing, therapeutics, or even immunity.

The most common variant of interest in New Jersey is B.1.156, a variant first detected in New York in November. The state reports a handful of B.1.156 cases in Cape May County.

The second is variants of concern – variants with increased transmissibility that can also interfere with diagnostic tests and cause more disease severity.

The most common example of a virus of concern is B.1.1.7, detected first in the United Kingdom and now the most prevalent virus in new cases of Covid, the most common variant circulating in New Jersey and Cape May County.

The last classification is variants' high consequence. This is a variant that may cause a significant reduction in vaccine effectiveness or even disease immunity. So far, no variants have risen to this level.

The race to vaccinate 70% of the adult population is an attempt to deny the virus hosts for continuous mutation. It is to prevent the appearance of dangerous variants that might rise to the level of high consequence.

Signs of a Strong Summer

The CDC proffered new guidance that gives increased freedom to fully vaccinated individuals. Such individuals may forego the mask outdoors, unless in a crowded location or venue.

New Jersey is set to roll back indoor capacity limits, increase the permitted size of indoor gatherings, and expand numbers at indoor event venues.

A key to safety may be the ability of health and community leaders to convince those on the fence regarding vaccination to join the growing ranks of the fully vaccinated.

To contact Vince Conti, email vconti@cmcherald.com.

Poll

Are you still reluctant to get a Covid vaccine despite them being available since December?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

[Vote](#)

[View Results](#)