



COVID-19: 17 more Montclairites test positive; virus claims two more lives



Governor Phil Murphy holds a coronavirus briefing in Trenton on March 23. Shown is State Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli. Edwin J. Torres for Governor's Office

By JAIMIE JULIA WINTERS
winters@montclairlocal.news

Seventeen more Montclair residents have tested positive for COVID-19, and two more residents have died as a result of the virus, township health department officials said Wednesday, March 25.

Statewide totals continued to rise as testing for COVID-19 expands. The number of positive cases in New Jersey rose to 4,402, up from 3,675 on Tuesday. The day-to-day increase Wednesday was smaller (727 cases) than Tuesday's (846 cases).

But the number of deaths sets a dire picture, rising from the total 44 reported on Tuesday, to 62 today. The 18 new deaths related to COVID-19 is the largest one-day increase in fatalities. Three of those deaths were out of Essex County, two of those from Montclair.

In Montclair, 38 residents so far have tested positive, resulting in six deaths in total.

State Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli said of the 62 deaths to date, ages range from 30 to 93 years of age, with the median age of 79; 65 percent are male; 35 percent female. Twenty-four percent were 30 to 60 years of age, while 76 percent were over the age of 60. Forty-eight percent had an underlying medical condition: obesity, lung disease, diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Twenty-six percent were in long-term care facilities.

Persichilli said New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo predicts that his state will see the peak in cases in 14 to 21 days, which could be an indicator of New Jersey's path forward.

"When we see this peak in New York, we can expect to follow the trend, especially in the north," she said. "We are hoping the mitigation strategies will reduce the impact on our state, but we must be prepared."

The state has been surveying closed hospitals and hospital wings and hopes to add another 1,360 beds with the reopening of some. The state also plans to open field acute care centers adding another 1,000 beds at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, the New Jersey Convention Center and Exposition Center in Edison, the Atlantic City Convention Center, and another to be determined.

"No one is dispensable, Every life matters. We will fight to save every single life in New Jersey," said Gov. Phil Murphy.

The state also announced that daycare centers will be shut down by April 1. The state will certify some that will remain open to provide daycare for children of healthcare workers, law enforcement, first responders, essential service workers and essential government workers.

All non-essential businesses in New Jersey have been ordered to close. Yesterday Murphy announced the creation of a hotline to report nonessential businesses that remained open or businesses that are requiring their non-essential workers to report to work. Due to the volume of calls the system crashed today, said Murphy.

"This isn't a polite suggestion," he said about the businesses that aren't complying.

Tuesday night, Murphy announced that cell phone sale and repair shops, bicycle shops to provide service and repair, livestock feed stores, nursery and garden centers and farming equipment stores are now considered essential and can remain open.

The state has ordered residents to stay home unless they need to buy essential items, report to an essential job, or go outside for exercise. All gatherings have been ordered to be canceled. Law enforcement agencies are cracking down on violations and recently broke up a private party and wedding in Lakewood. Some counties, including Gloucester, began issuing disorderly person summons for those not complying with the stay at home order, Murphy said.

Montclair sent out an announcement reminding residents that all parks, fields, playgrounds, walking paths and play courts remain closed to the public until further notice.

“All township recreation and sports areas and facilities will be monitored by the Montclair Police Department,” the statement read.

The state has tested about 14,000 residents so far. Officials reported that 29 percent of the test results received today were positive.

Tomorrow, March 26, a new drive-thru testing facility will open at Weequahic Park in Newark, open only to Essex County residents showing symptoms, and by appointment only.

The first two days of testing will take place Thursday, March 26, and Saturday, March 28. One hundred tests a day will be administered to Essex County residents only, and by appointment only.

Residents can visit www.EssexCOVID.org, where they will be required to complete a short online screening process before an appointment is scheduled. Residents will be asked several health-related questions and to detail any symptoms they have related to the coronavirus. Upon completion of the survey, they will be informed if they are eligible for the screening. If they are eligible, a confirmation number will be provided. Residents must bring the confirmation number with them to their appointment and must arrive by car.

That follows the opening of FEMA-operated testing facilities at Bergen Community College and the PNC Arts Center in Holmdel, as well as a facility for Hudson County residents only in Secaucus and a facility at William Paterson University for only Passaic County residents with documentation from a doctor.