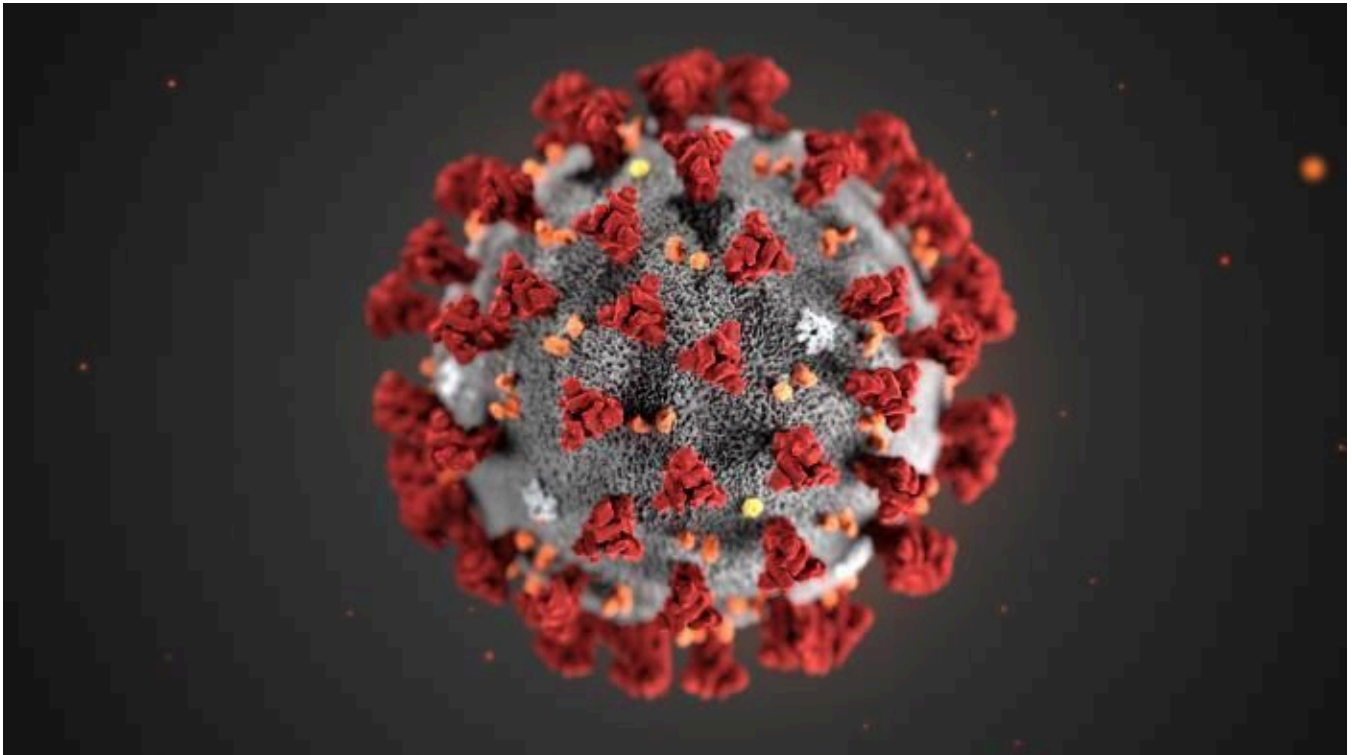


Council gets some good news on COVID

December 25, 2020



As COVID-19 cases continue to climb in Crescent City, the city council received a dose of good news Monday.

Mitch Hanna, the CEO of Sutter Coast Hospital, said the increased cases has not caused a problem at the hospital, yet, and he also shared that the first medical staff at the hospital received vaccinations Monday.

Hanna said getting the process of vaccinations started was a big step forward. He said 29 people were vaccinated Monday, and he expected another 30 to be vaccinated Tuesday.

“This will be a process over the next month or two,” Hanna said. “We are currently using the Pfizer vaccine.”

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, the city’s director of public health, said because of the extreme cold storage requirements for the Pfizer vaccine, it is being store in Eureka and transported for use to Crescent City.

“We are in the very, very first stage in rolling out the vaccine in the county,” Rehwaldt said. “We pulled our first doses of the vaccine out that we’ll be using this week. It’s good news on the front of vaccines. As far as the overall picture in California, it’s really grim.”

Through Monday, there were 673 total cases in Del Norte County since the pandemic began. In the last 14 days, 126 new cases were reported and there were 150 active cases. Even the high numbers, though, had not had a major impact on the hospital.

“We have ample capacity,” Hanna said. “Currently, we have two COVID-positive cases in the hospital. Like every hospital in the country, ER visits are down. I think people are afraid to come to the hospital, and they shouldn’t be. We take great precautions so that patients are not being unnecessarily exposed to the virus. Overall, we are running at an average daily census of 45 or 50 percent capacity. So, we have ample space.”

With cases rising, there is concern that more people could end up at the hospital, Councilman Blake Inscore said.

“What kind of contingency plan do you have in place if we see a significant surge of COVID cases,” Inscore asked. “Obviously, we’ve seen a very high surge of actual cases, but we haven’t seen this in the hospital.”

Hanna said the hospital has had a plan in place since earlier this year and is prepared if the worst happens.

“The hospital has 49 licensed beds,” he said. “With our surge plan, we would have a capacity of 75 beds. The county has acquired a tent we could use for surge, which will add an additional 15 beds.”

“I think it’s good for the public to know a lot of thought has gone into this and the hospital has a good contingency plan,” Inscore said.

Answering a question from Councilman Beau Smith, Hanna said the hospital has adequate respirators, explaining the hospital purchased more than 10 portable respirators a few years ago and upgraded them this year.

“We are very well suited,” Hanna said.

Rehwaldt told the council the Northern California region, which includes Del Norte County, is the only region in the state not on mandatory lockdowns, but he said that could change.

“We could be alongside the rest of the state any day,” he said. “It could happen tomorrow.”

Rehwaldt said much like Halloween and Christmas, he is worried about the impact of the Christmas holiday. He said large gatherings, even family gatherings, often lead to a spike in cases.

“Christmas will have an impact in a couple of weeks,” Rehwaldt said. “I can’t stress enough the importance of not having those big Christmas parties, staying at home with your immediate family. Now is not the time to take chances.”

As the vaccine starts arriving in greater amounts, Rehwaldt said the county is looking to vaccinate the elderly as soon as possible.

“We don’t really know what the schedule is going to be, but we do recognize they need to be pretty high up on the list,” he said. “If we vaccinate the most vulnerable people, not only are we going to save some lives,

we're also going to reduce the chance of over impacting the medical system. That's really two of our goals.”