

COVID cases surge in Del Norte County

January 14, 2022



An Omicron-fueled surge in positive COVID-19 cases swept through Del Norte County this past week - prompting boards, commissions and sports teams to revert to previous safety measures, and resulting in increased hospitalizations.

On Tuesday morning, Public Health Officer Dr. Aaron Stutz reported that there were 159 active cases, though that number increased by late afternoon when the Del Norte Public Health Authority website reported 182 active cases. Hospitalizations of people with symptoms at Sutter Coast Hospital also increased, from two to five.

However, no new deaths were reported and Stutz said the most recent surge could be a sign that the virus - though more contagious, may be losing its previous virulent status.

The general feeling is that we'll have a large spike in new cases that will rapidly drop, hopefully, after that spike," Stutz said, adding that hospitalizations and case fatalities will rise, but not "near the same rate that we saw with the Delta variant."

On Tuesday morning, Stutz presented the latest update about COVID infections to the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors. He also said cases had increased by up to 300% compared to the week prior, and those

infected were almost evenly split between the non-vaccinated and “break through” cases of vaccinated individuals.

“We’re hoping it won’t be enough to overwhelm hospitals,” Stutz said. “But unfortunately, it’s going to cause a lot of missed work and it’s going to cause increased visits to the emergency department and primary care visits.”

As the numbers started to increase last week, various organizations voted to make temporary changes that would allow elected officials to attend meetings through teleconferencing.

On Jan. 7, the Crescent City Council passed a resolution to allow elected members to attend meetings online for at least 30 days. The provision also applies to the planning commission, redevelopment agency, the housing authority and other standing committees of the city council. On January 4, the Crescent City Harbor Commission also voted to allow its members to log in for meetings from home.

“Being a person that’s in this situation right now, I feel like we have conducted all of our business openly and the public has participated,” said Crescent City Councilor Blake Inscore.

In a follow up inquiry from The Triplicate, City Manager Eric Wier said he couldn’t comment on whether city council or staff members had tested positive or were quarantined.

“As stated at the meeting, it sounded like at least one member of the council and most likely two would not have been able to attend an in-person meeting on January 10,” he said. “However, with virtual meetings we expect to still have a full council.”

On Jan. 10, all of the Crescent City councilors were able to attend the council meeting through teleconference.

At Del Norte Unified, 39 students and six staff members were reported to be COVID-positive on January 11, with 26 of those cases occurring at Del Norte High School.

About a week before that, the Humboldt-Del Norte League of the CIF voted 6-4 to eliminate all spectators from indoor winter sports until January 23, with Del Norte Unified casting one of the opposing votes. Sports not regulated by CIF, including the district’s middle schools, still allow spectators to attend indoor sporting events.

As the week progressed, some of Del Norte Unified’s families posted comments on social media, which prompted the following response from the district on January 10:

"It has come to our attention that, over the weekend, misinformation has been spread through social media regarding school closures in Del Norte County. To be clear, there are no immediate plans to close schools, and there is also no emergency school board meeting this afternoon. District officials and leadership from the Del Norte Teachers' Association did meet last Tuesday and did discuss contingency plans in the event that the state or local public health officer mandated school closures. However, neither the state nor local public health officials have indicated that they are considering closing any school in Del Norte at this time. The board, staff, and leadership of the district are committed to providing in-person learning opportunities for our students, to the fullest extent possible. For accurate information on school issues, including closures and board meetings, information will be posted at dnusd.org."

There are a total of 4,103 students and staff at Del Norte Unified.

As of the January 11 reported COVID numbers, the positive cases comprise 1.10% of the student and staff school population.