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## COVID surge appears to be slowing

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The summer surge in COVID cases appears to be slowing , and vaccination rates, while still much lower in Del Norte County than other more populated California regions, is slowly but steadily increasing, according to a COVID surge update Thursday.

First, the numbers in Del Norte County at a glance: there are currently 131 active cases, substantially down from the August high of 417. Twelve people, as of Friday, were hospitalized and the average age for people contracting new COVID cases remains 36.

46.9% are fully vaccinated and 7.8% are partially vaccinated, that represents an increase in both categories since the beginning of August where the vaccination rate hovered in the low 40s.

Public Health Director Aaron Stutz, while encouraged by the increase in vaccinations and the downward trend in cases, said the COVID crisis is not over and will spike again without vaccination rates continuing to increase, even for those who have survived the virus.

“If you’ve had COVID-19, you have some immunity but you’re still able to have a breakthrough case,” he said.

Meantime, Schools Superintendent Jeff Harris also reported good news.

“The mitigating efforts in our schools and community are working.” Harris reported a significant decrease down to 13 cases. “The mask rule, not everyone likes but it’s working.”

Schools have been working with nurses on testing and contact tracing. But Harris said the bottom line is that if your child has symptoms, keep them home, get them tested and quarantine if the test is positive.

“We want to be able to keep students and teachers in school and parents at work,” he said. “We’re making progress, and we want to keep that going. I want to encourage everyone to stay home if they have symptoms and if they test positive.”

Despite encouraging numbers, in Del Norte County there are roughly 30 new cases as of Friday September 24. Masks and social distancing are the best protection even if you’ve been vaccinated.

Dr. Stutz reiterated the policy of wearing a mask, suggesting it’s helped slow the infection rates.

“If you’re wearing a mask, even if you take it off sometimes, you’ve brought the infection rate down any time you wear it around other people,” he said.

Stutz encouraged residents to get vaccinated, saying the goal is a 75% rate in Del Norte County.

“The best protection, based on the data, is the vaccine,” he said.

The average for the state of California is roughly 59%, which is still 10 percent higher than Del Norte.