

Mortuary full as COVID rages

September 4, 2021



Crescent City Manager Eric Wier said the Wier Mortuary Chapel — his former family business — is now full, in-part due to a tremendous spike in COVID-19 cases in the county.

“They’re beyond capacity at this point... We’re providing resources for additional refrigeration trucks just to deal with this surge. That’s what we’re talking about here,” said Wier during a COVID town hall meeting co-hosted by State Senator Mike McGuire last Thursday.

“We are not talking about case numbers anymore, we’re not talking about the hospital impacts. We’re talking about our local mortuary, who has built tremendous capacity, and has always been here for this community and always will be here for this community — they are now at capacity.”

McGuire said low vaccination rates in the region, as well as the introduction of the Delta variant, are to blame for the spike in cases. He also said the worst is yet to come.

“I want to be blunt, we believe the worst of this public health crisis is yet to come. The next two to four weeks is when we could potentially see a peak in cases,” said McGuire.

McGuire said although there have been 10 deaths linked to the virus since August 13, he and other officials believe the actual number of deaths is higher. According to McGuire, those reported deaths occurred at the local hospital, and many other deaths in the community could also be linked to COVID after further investigation.

“I don’t want to talk politics here tonight, I just want to talk about the facts and how we can protect the public’s health. The best way out of this pandemic right now is by getting the shot. Vaccines are safe, they’re abundant in California and they’re always going to be free,” said McGuire.

In addition to Wier and McGuire, many other local officials weighed in on how the current surge is impacting their respective sectors, including representatives from the public health department, hospital, county, schools and city.

After announcing a countywide mask mandate for indoor public spaces earlier in the day, County Public Health Officer Dr. Aaron Stutz said the prevalence of COVID in the community is “quite high,” citing a more than 10% test positivity rate in the county, which is double the statewide average.

“If you are having COVID symptoms in Del Norte right now, you are very likely to have COVID and much more likely than in other counties,” said Stutz.

In addition to the mandate, Stutz also strongly recommended bars and restaurants reduce their capacity to 50% and urged employers to allow employees to work from home when possible. He also recommended businesses and members of the public to forgo hosting or attending large gatherings.

Stutz said he hoped these actions would reduce the case numbers enough for him to avoid taking stronger actions in the coming weeks.

County Supervisor Chris Howard said the latest surge has tested the county’s resources. The county board unanimously supported Stutz’s mask mandate at an emergency meeting the same day.

“We have lived through this in the last year and a half and we’ve done quite well in curbing death and infection rates, and demonstrated quite clearly that we can make it through it, but we relaxed. It’s not a time to relax any further, it’s a time to move forward,” said Howard.

CEO of Sutter Health Mitch Hanna said the majority of COVID-positive patients at the hospital were unvaccinated as of last Thursday. According to Hanna, 83% of the hospital’s 23 cases of COVID were among unvaccinated individuals. Additionally, six of eight COVID-positive patients in the ICU were unvaccinated, as well as the five of the six patients on ventilators.

During his update, Superintendent Jeff Harris said he’s received some negative feedback from the community about schools opening in-person given the current COVID situation. But, Harris said state law requires schools open in-person.

Additionally, Harris said distance learning last year had a negative impact on many students and families.

“Our students suffered disproportionately by not having access to a variety of services, and quite honestly, a comprehensive education. It damaged families and it damaged many aspects of our communities and our society.”

Harris outlined the precautions the district is taking to prevent the spread of the virus in the schools.

According to California Department of Public Health guidelines, masks will be required for students and teachers, and all school employees will either be required to prove their vaccination status or test for COVID-19 weekly.

With Del Norte High’s first football game of the season slated to kick-off the following day, Harris said athletes will be required to wear masks except when playing. Spectators will also be required to wear masks.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake Inscore urged the community to band together in order to ward off the current surge.

“We’re not all in the same situation, but we’re all in the same fight, and you and I have a responsibility to step up right now, and you have the ability to do it,” said Inscore. “Hear me clearly now, we need to take this serious Crescent City and Del Norte County. We need to help one another.”