

Rochester, Greece among schools halting COVID testing

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

From Staff Reports

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Now that the Finger Lakes region has been removed from the state’s orange and yellow zone designations, at least some local school districts no longer will test some of their students and employees on-site.

Rochester and Greece, the two largest school districts in Monroe County, both announced they would no longer conduct tests. Rochester, which opens for most elementary school students on Feb. 8, said it was doing so under guidance from the Monroe County Department of Public Health.

Other districts either did not announce plans or said they will continue to test until receiving firmer guidance from the state. Schools have consistently argued that there were extremely few cases of in-person transmission in school buildings.

The testing at schools, though, was seen as a useful community barometer. By ceasing its testing just before its wider reopening, RCSD further stoked the uproar from teachers who already were resisting a return to in-person learning.

Call 211 for COVID clinic updates and assistance with appointments

Individuals across the Finger Lakes region can now call 211 to get COVID-19 information and clinic updates, Dr. Nancy Bennett says.

People can get assistance but can’t schedule appointments through 211, she said on Twitter. The hotline is open 24/7.

When calling, choose “COVID information.” A call-back function is available.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo this week highlighted the disparity (differences of 30 percentage points between hospitals in the Finger Lakes region) and suggested departments of health should intervene.

On average, Rochester Regional’s vaccination rate is in the mid-60% range, said Dr. Robert Mayo, the hospital system’s chief medical officer. But United Memorial Medical Center in Batavia, Genesee County, is closer to 50%.

Strong Memorial is boasting a vaccination rate of just more than 85%.

Statewide, the vaccination rate for health care workers is reportedly at 72%.

There is some question of which reporting system and when the state is pulling its numbers, as well as how the different health systems are reporting those numbers.

But Mayo said Rochester Regional also is, or will soon be surveying those staffers who deferred or declined a vaccine to assess what might be done to improve acceptance.

Asked to explain the confounding contrast in rates between hospital systems, he said, “Yes, I know. That’s a bummer. We are all committed to doing our best, so nobody wants to be behind. But I don’t know.”

Mayo declined to single out any segment of the workforce, by title or unit, saying more important than the “who”, is the “why.” Nonetheless there has been, and continues to be focused outreach, Mayo said.

Dr. Michael Mendoza, public health commissioner for Monroe County, said he or his staff is in almost daily communication with leadership of the two hospital systems. He said vaccination has been “robust” overall, citing what he said has been declining absentee and sick calls for hospital workers.

Bennett is director of the Center for Community Health and Prevention at the University of Rochester Medical Center, co-director of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute and a professor.

Latest Monroe County COVID-19 cases

There were 35 new deaths reported Thursday, and none on Friday. The total is now 937 to date.

The dates of death were Jan. 8-24.

The seven-day rolling average positivity rate for Monroe County was 4.0% Friday, down from 4.6%.

There are 234 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the last update. The seven-day rolling average of new cases was 285 new cases per day.

In the Finger Lakes region, 596 people were hospitalized, 134 of them in ICU.

On a seven-day rolling average in the Finger Lakes region, 33% of total hospital beds were available.

Rochester Regional at a loss over lag in staff vaccination rates

Lagging vaccination rates among Rochester Regional Health employees has hospital officials at a loss — particularly as UR Medicine, operating in the same region, posts considerably higher numbers.

But for those either deferring or declining the vaccine, Mendoza said: “It speaks to the diversity of our community. It speaks to the fact there are still a lot of questions we want to answer If you work in a health care setting I want everybody to ask your questions, and ensure you get the appropriate answers, so that you make the right decision. Because, at the end of the day, I want to see as high as rate as possible of COVID vaccination in all of our health care centers.”

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