

LI COVID-19 cases top 600 as Nassau launches 'traveling vaccine' program for businesses
Newsday 8.3.21



src="https://cdn.newsday.com/polopoly_fs/1.50324374.1628017641!/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_456/image.jpg" alt="Angel Human, an employee at Cafe Baci in" />

Angel Human, an employee at Cafe Baci in Westbury, gets a COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday. Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

By Newsday Staff Updated August 3, 2021 3:07 PM

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This story was reported by **Bart Jones, Victor Ocasio, David Olson, Tory Parrish, Jean-Paul Salamanca** and **John Valenti**. It was written by Jones.

Long Island has surpassed 600 new daily cases of COVID-19 as the highly contagious delta variant spreads, while Nassau County launched a "traveling vaccine" program Tuesday to try to get shots into some of the thousands of people who remain unvaccinated.

Nassau County registered 315 new cases in test results from Monday, while Suffolk County had 309, for a total of 624 in the region, state data released on Tuesday showed.

As recently as June, Long Island was well below 100 new daily cases.

New York City, where cases are also on the rise, registered 1,444 new cases in results from Monday.

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Other COVID-19 indicators also continued to increase, with the seven-day average for positivity in test results surpassing 3% on Long Island for the second day in a row.

The average has risen in the last three days on Long Island from 2.92% to 3.03% to 3.24%. The statewide level has gone from 2.46% to 2.53% to 2.65%.

The number of people hospitalized with the virus in the state increased on Monday by 64 patients, to 852.

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Throughout the state, five people died on Monday of causes linked to the virus including one in Nassau County.

"The vaccine is the weapon that will win the war against COVID, but too many still have not taken advantage of its availability," Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said in a statement Tuesday. "Every single unvaccinated individual provides the virus an opportunity to mutate into a strain that may be even more harmful than those that came before it. The vaccine is free, accessible and effective, so if you haven't already, get yours today."

Nassau County will institute a new "traveling" vaccination program to bring the vaccine directly to businesses throughout the county, so employees and their families can join the ranks of the vaccinated, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran said Tuesday.

Although Nassau has one of the highest vaccination rates for any county in the state, more could be done, Curran said in announcing the program at a news conference outside Cafe Baci in Westbury.

But Curran and Nassau County Health Commissioner Lawrence E. Eisenstein said there would be no business mandate on vaccination requirements for employees or patrons, saying Nassau would leave that decision up to business owners.

"I believe business owners can make this decision for themselves," Curran said. "I trust business owners to make these decisions for themselves."

According to the latest figures available, 68.8% of all Nassau residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, with 61.9% fully vaccinated.

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But the current positive test rate is now at about 3.3% in Nassau, well up from a low of about 0.3%.

The new traveling program will bring the vaccine — Nassau uses the two-dose Moderna vaccine — directly to businesses who request it. All employees and family members, regardless of immigration status, are eligible, Curran said

"Big business, small business, our goal is to get 100 percent of residents vaccinated," Curran said. "Immigration status is irrelevant ... With many businesses now requiring vaccinations, we at Nassau County want to make it as easy as we can for employees to get vaccinated."

Appointments for the traveling vaccine are available at 516-227-9570. Curran said residents should call the number "and we'll get it over to you, make it as easy as possible."

David Mandell, who operates six grocery stores, including a Holiday Farms supermarket in Roslyn Heights and one in Glen Head, said he would consider having Nassau's mobile vaccination program at his supermarkets if there was space for the setup.

"We don't have big parking lots," he said. None of his stores has a pharmacy, Mandell said.

"I'd have to know more about the program. If it's a car and a tent outside," that is something he said his stores could handle. But there might not be enough capacity for several vans and tents, he said.

Most of Mandell's 250 employees are vaccinated, but he is not requiring it because he is unsure of what the legal ramifications of that would be, he said.

Employees and customers who are not vaccinated are asked to wear masks in Mandell's stores, he said. He started allowing employees to take off their masks about two weeks ago, but that policy might change, given the new circumstances with the delta variant, he said.

Robert C. Creighton, managing partner of commercial law firm Farrell Fritz in Uniondale, lauded the county's announcement Tuesday, calling it a "step in the right direction."

"We're all looking for the best way to prevent the transmission of the virus in the workplace," said Creighton, whose firm has 154 employees and represents business clients across the Island, New York City and nationwide.

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"Getting people vaccinated is key, so I would welcome the program the county executive is rolling out as I understand it and don't think there's a downside to it," he said.

The firm is now fully back in the office — except for some remote workers — and has encouraged employees to get the shot. Although most have been vaccinated, he said, and employees who haven't received the vaccine are required to wear masks in the office.

"We require proof of vaccination, or, if you don't provide proof, we require masks at all times," Creighton said.

He said the firm was considering a move toward a mandatory testing policy for unvaccinated workers "very soon" as the number of positive cases continue to rise. "I think that's something more and more businesses are leaning toward," he said.

"We're looking for the best way to prevent transmission in the workplace," Creighton said. "There's no question that the best way is vaccination."

Other efforts to get people to get their shots are underway in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Riverhead officials are partnering with farm advocacy groups and nonprofits to drive vaccination rates up among town residents, seniors and agricultural workers.

Riverhead, the Long Island Farm Bureau and the Northfork Spanish Apostolate will distribute vaccines to senior citizens, agricultural workers and Riverhead residents ages 12 and up on Aug. 12-13 at the Riverhead Senior Center in Aquebogue.

Long Island Farm Bureau president Rob Carpenter told Newsday that outdoor working conditions may have helped to protect most farmworkers from becoming infected. However, Carpenter said his organization believed it was important to offer vaccines for people in the Island's agricultural community.

"We believe the farmers and farmworkers make up a vital part of the town of Riverhead, and we want to do everything we can to assure the safety of the farmers and workers, which is how we got involved in the town's vaccination efforts," Carpenter said.

Vaccinations will take place at the senior center, located on 60 Shade Tree Ln. in Aquebogue, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days. Preregistration is required.

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People interested can call Riverhead Supervisor Yvette Aguiar's office at (631) 727-3200, ext. 653, or the Riverhead Senior Center at ext. 290 to schedule an appointment. People can also preregister by visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CFRC6R8>, and they will receive a callback to schedule an appointment.

Long Island FQHC, which offers COVID-19 vaccinations at five of its nonprofit health centers in Nassau, will offer prize drawings starting Aug. 8 to people getting newly vaccinated. The prizes are tablets, \$50 Visa gift cards and seven-day-unlimited-ride MetroCards, said David Nemiroff, president and CEO of Long Island FQHC, which focuses services on medically underserved parts of Nassau.

"We need everybody to be vaccinated so we can reduce the spread of COVID," Nemiroff said. "The delta variant is very contagious, and vaccinations are a way to make sure our communities are safe and healthy."

The five health centers that administer vaccinations are in Elmont, Freeport, Hempstead, Roosevelt and Westbury.

Funding for the incentives is from a grant from the Community Health Care Association of New York State, Nemiroff said.

"We'll be rolling out other incentives over the next few months," he said. Long Island FQHC already is discussing possible incentives with supermarkets, hair salons, mini-golf venues and other businesses, he said. The organization already offers free Uber rides to its health centers for people getting vaccinated.