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# CAPE MAY COUNTY HERALD

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## Health Care Workers 'Hanging in' Amid 2nd Wave

By KAREN KNIGHT

**COURT HOUSE** - The medical professionals working with the public during the second wave of COVID-19 infections are doing what they can to manage their stress, according to Dr. John Ruskey, medical director of Cape Regional Medical Center's (CRMC) three urgent care facilities.

He said the staff, including those who work in the emergency room at CRMC, hit their peak of stress around July 4.

"While it's very challenging today, we are not quite as busy," he noted. "I do think we are in for a few tough weeks ahead of us, though.

"I think everyone has had it with 2020," he added. "The COVID vaccine is promising. It's very important psychologically, like the light at the end of the tunnel.

"From conversations I have had with other doctors, the vaccine could be approved by mid-December, which would be great news. If it's available as soon as December or January, I'll be rolling up my sleeves and be one of the first ones to get it.

"I think the drug companies have gone through the proper channels and done their due diligence, and I am not concerned about being one of the first to receive the vaccine," he continued.

Ruskey said the medical staff, which he called "unsung heroes," learned how to better treat the virus and what personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn, having gained a track record from treating it over the past nine months.

"I think the big difference between now and the spring is that in early spring, no one knew much about the virus," the doctor said. "We went from an era of not knowing to being better able to protect ourselves and treat our patients, and to keep safe."

See related story on page A8



Cape Regional Medical Center

**Even in a lab, Cape Regional Medical Center staff wear protective equipment while running COVID-19 tests. Three local urgent care centers are seeing an increase in patients this year, mostly due to COVID-19 testing.**

At CRMC this spring, Ruskey said they converted eight rooms with special ventilation to handle COVID-19 patients.

"Overall, after dealing with this for nine months, there are new therapies, steroids, and anti-virals to treat COVID patients," he noted. "The work being done by our staff is very important, but it's stressful. They are hanging in there, and I believe we will succeed."

Like many others in the medical field, Ruskey lived apart from his family at the beginning of the

pandemic to limit their exposure. As a doctor with 30 years of experience in the emergency room, he said the COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest challenge he's seen. He is quick to point out, however, that the staff has "risen" to the challenge.

"I am deeply aware of how much this county and its businesses depend on tourism," Ruskey said, "and I believe we met the challenge this summer of keeping the virus contained as much as we could.

"We were able to work with local businesses to

**"The work being done by our staff is very important, but it's stressful. They are hanging in there, and I believe we will succeed."**

- Dr. John Ruskey, medical director of Cape Regional Medical Center's urgent care facilities

get their staff tested quickly if there was exposure, so they could minimize the impact and stay open as much as possible. I think our staff's responses had a real effect on our economy."

He recalled that Cape May County had the lowest number of cases and deaths in the state during the spring, and he credits his staff for achieving that.

"Every day, our staff is interacting with the public, giving them important and correct information, and testing them," Ruskey said. "There is a lot of incorrect information out there, and we couldn't do as much testing as we are without them (staff)."

At the Cape Regional Urgent Care, in Marmora, Ruskey said the number of patients they have seen is up 400%, about 120-130 weekly. The urgent care, in Wildwood, is up 200%, with 80-100 patients weekly, and the Court House location is up 100%, with about 100 patients weekly; 70% to 80% of the increase is due to COVID-19.

(Page A25 Please)

## Warming Centers Won't Open Due to COVID-19

County's Code Blue Program Returns to Motel Model

By BILL BARLOW

**COURT HOUSE** - Cape May County saw two mild winters in a row. Donna Groome is not counting on a third.

"I always want to be prepared," said Groome, head of Cape May County's Department of Human Services, in a recent interview. This year, that means preparing to protect some of the county's most vulnerable residents when the temperatures dip below freezing while also keeping them safe from COVID-19.

This winter, that will mean a return to an old system for nights when Code Blue is declared.

### Analysis

## COVID-19 Update: A Month Like No Other

By VINCE CONTI

**COURT HOUSE** - This week (Nov. 24-30) brought November to a close. The pandemic has been a presence in the county since March 18. Yet, November's 30 days recorded 1,192 new confirmed COVID-19 cases, more than the previous five months combined.

November also saw 11 county COVID-19 fatalities, the most since 17 residents died from complications associated with the virus in July.

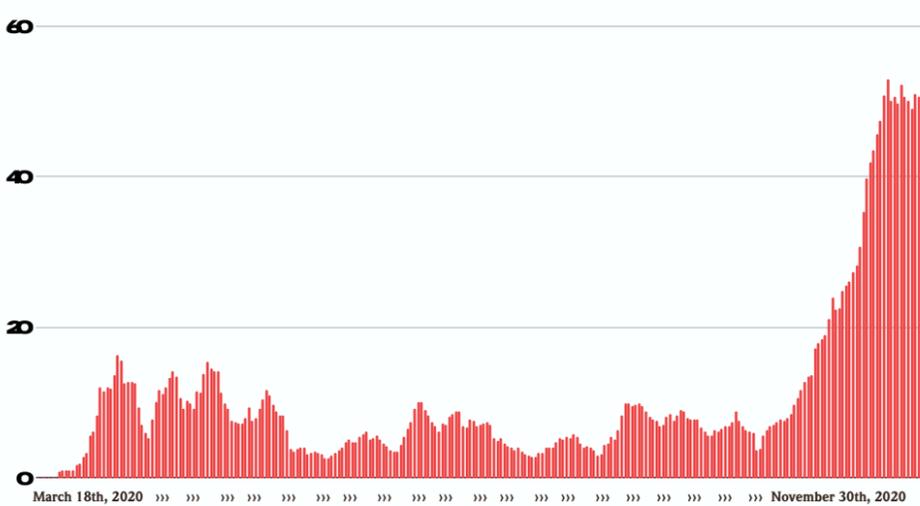
County health officials reported 319 new resident cases, along with 19 positive tests among nonresidents.

The distribution of cases conforms to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) projections that about 80% of the individuals who contract the disease will not experience serious complications.

Of the total cases recorded among county residents since March, 78% were removed from quarantine. At present, 523 county residents remain as active COVID-19 cases, about 18%

(Page A12 Please)

COVID-19: New Resident Cases by Day



Source: Cape May County Health Department

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(Page A12 Please)

### HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS Page A15

Holiday shopping and happenings.



Plan your dining and entertainment fun with family and friends. Page A15



### HEALTH & WELLNESS

Stay healthy with tips from local pros! Page A26



### OPINION

Columns and letters. Page A42

Spout Off. Page A10

### WEEKLY FEATURES

Celebrations/Births	<b>A10</b>	Opinion	<b>A42</b>
Classifieds	<b>A31</b>	Real Estate	<b>A33</b>
DoTheShore	<b>A15</b>	Religion	<b>A9</b>
Health & Wellness	<b>A26</b>	Spout Off	<b>A10</b>
Obituaries	<b>A40</b>	Tides/Fishing	<b>A24</b>

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