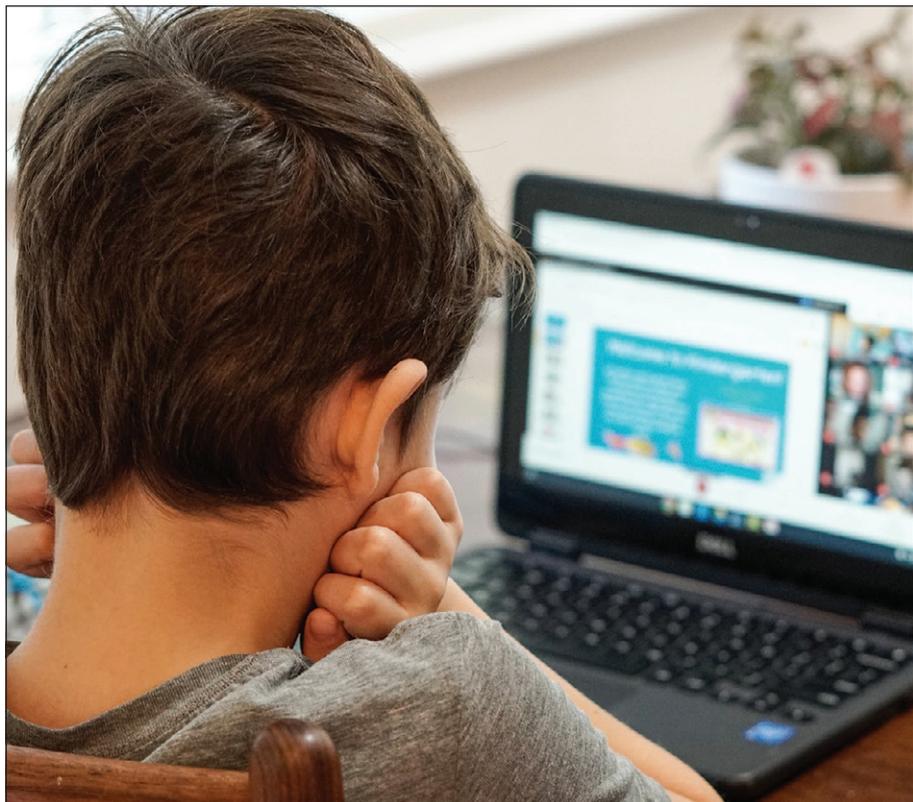


COVID-19 experts focus on hospital bed space



File photo

After more than a year of starts, stops and virtual learning, all West Virginia schools are scheduled to begin the 2021-22 academic year in person.

Contingency plans in place for schools as Delta surges

by Charles Young, John Mark Shaver & Kaliee Kroll
STAFF WRITERS

CHARLESTON — With the Delta variant of COVID-19 becoming more prevalent in West Virginia by the day, state leaders are working to make sure that hospitals are prepared to take on an increase in patients affected by the virus.

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported Friday there were 210 people in the hospital with COVID-19 across the state, a number that has steadily grown over the past few weeks.

West Virginia COVID-19 czar Dr. Clay Marsh said state leaders had a meeting with the West Virginia Hospital Association to make sure hospitals are prepared to take in even more patients suffering from the virus.

"Everybody is very concerned with what is coming," Marsh said. "We are making provisions and plans to try to make sure that we have a sufficient

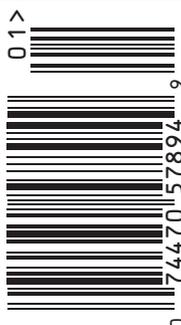
ability for our hospitals to function, as we believe that this variant is going to make more and more people sick in the upcoming several weeks. We also know that, with our unvaccinated population and our chronically medically ill population and older population in West Virginia, we are at a very high risk to see a set of problems that we really haven't seen yet in the pandemic."

On the topic of the 2021-2022 school year, Gov. Jim Justice has said counties should not anticipate a delay in the start of school statewide or a mask mandate for younger students, although plans could change if the COVID-19 pandemic continues to get worse.

Justice said Friday there is "no reason to believe" that students won't be going back to school or that the "wheels would fly off," but he noted the state is prepared in the event that changes need to be made.

"There are absolutely contingency plans, but no one wants to look at the alternative of our kids ... not going back to school," Justice said. "Our kids desperately need to go back to school, and right at this point in time and life, we do not see a need to address the possibility of our kids not going back to school. ..."

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