

As the COVID World Turns

I am at a complete loss as to how to begin, write, and end this installment of “As The COVID World Turns”.

I am sad 😞. I am extremely frustrated 🙄🔪. And I find myself becoming increasingly angry 😡. I was SO hopeful, a month ago, that soon we would be on our way to a “new normal”. Now here we are, with the COVID infection rate rising faster than a yeast dough! I am definitely NOT a happy camper!

To get a feel for what is happening I have created a table of COVID data, limited to the state of Pennsylvania and the counties of Lehigh and Northampton. The statistics come from the Pennsylvania COVID Early Warning Dashboard, updated on a weekly basis every Monday and the CDC COVID Tracker site, updated on a moving 7-day average basis.

DATE	PA POSITIVITY	CASES/100,00 PEOPLE	LEHIGH POSITIVITY	CASES/100,000 PEOPLE	NORTHAMPTON POSITIVITY	CASES/100,000 PEOPLE
July 13	1.2%	7	1.5%	10	1.6%	6
July 19	1.7%	12	2.3%	17	2.1%	16
July 25	2.8%	19	4.2%	30	4.4%	35
July 28				34		52
July 29				35		55

Per the CDC moving 7-day average, Lehigh County has seen a 44% increase in the positive infection rate and Northampton County has seen a 126% increase in the positive infection rate. While Lehigh County remains, for the time being, in the moderate transmission category, Northampton County, unfortunately, has progressed to the substantial transmission category. Hospitalizations of people infected with COVID has also gone up in both counties.

Why is this happening? In a nutshell? Not enough people have chosen to be vaccinated. In Lehigh County 57% of eligible people (those over the age of 18), have been fully vaccinated. In Northampton County 52% of eligible people have been fully vaccinated. The goal set by the national government, as well as by Governor Wolfe, for full vaccination was 70% of eligible people. The evidence is clearly showing that we missed the mark.

Over the past several days numerous governmental agencies (CDC, state governors, city mayors, etc.) have begun to once again recommend that ALL people, regardless of vaccination status, resume the use of face masks when inside any public setting. Evidence is showing that, while still somewhat rare, breakthrough infections of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated people are also occurring. How is this?

Being fully vaccinated against a disease does NOT equate to being immune from contracting that disease. NO vaccine offers 100% protection against the disease it is meant to combat. In the history of mankind only one (1) disease has been eradicated: that disease is smallpox.

Being fully vaccinated means that one is less likely to contract a disease. And if there is a breakthrough infection, the course of the disease is much more likely to be less severe. To date, this is what is being seen as it pertains to COVID and the vaccines. Yes, there have been breakthrough infections. However, in 99% of cases, they have not resulted in hospitalization and/or death. Breakthrough infections cannot be completely eliminated in an area where there continues to be community transmission of the disease. This also continues to be true of diseases such as polio, yellow fever, measles, etc.

Another reason we are experiencing an increase in the infection rate is the variants. In order to survive a virus first invades a host cell and then trades genetic material with that host cell so that the host cell begins to replicate the virus. Over millions of trades the genetic material of the virus begins to change ever so slightly. This has definitely been seen with SARS-CoV-2. There are currently four (4) “variants of interest”:

- Epsilon – first seen in California

Iota – first seen in New York

Eta – first seen in the United Kingdom

Kappa – first seen in India

There are also four (4) “variants of concern”:

- Alpha – first seen in the UK

Beta – first seen in South Africa

Gamma – first seen in Brazil

Delta – first seen in India

Delta seems to be the problem child for the world at this time. Again, I will get on the soap box and say, if more people had been vaccinated, much of what we are currently experiencing in this country with increased COVID infections could have been prevented.

So what is the bottom line? The bottom line is that, in order to keep all of us safe as we go forward with in person, indoor worship and meetings, we will be asking everyone to follow the current CDC guidelines as they pertain to areas of substantial or high transmission rates of COVID-19, and return to wearing face masks when in any UPG or St. John's Windish building.