

MD COVID-19 cases continue to increase

Poultry processors get local help

EASTON — Gov. Larry Hogan said Maryland must see a declining number of COVID-19 cases before the state's non-essential businesses can reopen, but the number of confirmed cases continued to rise over the week.

The state reported 1,150 new cases on Saturday alone. "The number of new COVID-19 cases must go down for 14 consecutive days, and that just hasn't happened yet," said Dr. Fredia Wadley, health officer for Talbot County.

"We expect our numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases to climb as testing increases, but other things including new hospital admissions and the death rate have not declined," Wadley said. This indicates that Maryland hasn't peaked yet. These primary benchmarks must go down for 14 consecutive days, and that just hasn't happened yet."

Outbreaks at poultry processing plants in Maryland and Delaware have caused the number of cases on the Eastern Shore to climb sharply. Though Talbot County has not had a significant number of cases linked to chicken processing plants,

some counties on the Mid-Shore and Lower Shore have experienced increases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has deployed teams to Maryland, Delaware and Virginia to respond to these outbreaks. State and local officials are working together to implement measures that will decrease the spread of the virus, including messaging to the Hispanic populations in each state.

In Talbot County, the Health Department partners with the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center to reach the local immigrant community. "The immigrant community here in Talbot County is caught demographically in a bad place," said ChesMRC Executive Director Matthew Peters. "Most are low income and most are considered essential employees. They work in food service, landscaping, construction, and housekeeping.

"Each and every day as they go out to work they are putting themselves more at risk,"



**DR. FREDIA
WADLEY**



**MATTHEW
PETERS**

he said. "Over time that risk just keeps accumulating. All it takes is one person to bring in the virus, and it will spread very quickly.

Staff at the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center work with the Health Department to translate information and to get it directly to the immigrant community. Some staffers have even been tapped to be trained to help with contact tracing.

"This is new for everybody," Peters said. "We have to digest information and make sure it's pertinent before we pass it along. If we don't know the answer, we ask Dr. Wadley or we get information directly from the Sheriff. Trust is an easy thing to break. We want to make sure we are sharing accurate information with our clients."

While the spread of the disease in area chicken plants is concerning, Dr. Wadley says it's equally disconcerting that some local businesses that are considered essential simply aren't taking sufficient measures to protect their employ-

ees and customers.

"I am getting complaints every day about businesses that are open but are not accepting their responsibility to take precautions to limit the spread of COVID 19," Wadley said. "We have spent more than two weeks educating businesses about the need for social distancing and the importance of wearing masks.

"While some are taking this seriously, we have some employers who tell their staff not to ask customers to wear a mask," she said. "Everyone is anxious to reopen, but not everyone wants to wear a mask. Some employers still are not willing to enforce precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These attitudes and behaviors are not only spreading the virus and increasing our numbers, they are delaying reopening."

The warm late spring weather has caused some Talbot County residents to chafe under the stay-at-home restrictions. "With the weather change, we all want to get out and go," said Corey Pack, president of the Talbot County Council. "But we have to remember that this is a very, very contagious disease. If we commit to doing our part and maintain the course, we will get through this."