

As vaccines arrived, COVID came home for the holidays in Augusta County, Staunton and Waynesboro

by Jeff Schwaner

The end of the year saw COVID cases and deaths continue to rise even as a new count began — that of Virginians receiving their first shots of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

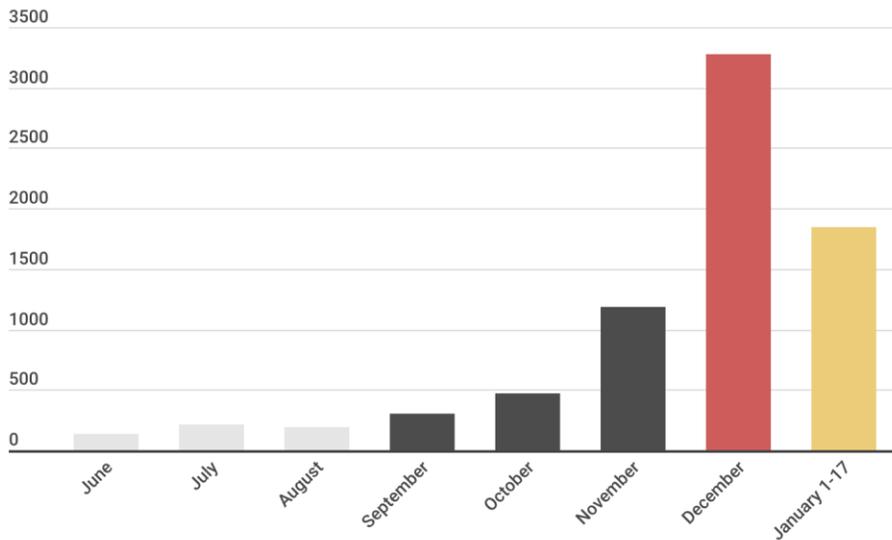
Sixteen area people died of COVID-19 in the last two days of December, ending the most dangerous and deadly month of the pandemic for residents of Augusta County, Staunton and Waynesboro.

After reporting lower case numbers than most of Virginia for much of 2020, the SAW area finally felt the impact of the novel coronavirus in the year's last three months, with nearly 5,000 new cases reported.

Cases in December nearly tripled from the previous month's high with 3,271 new cases.

New COVID-19 cases by month in the area including Augusta County, Waynesboro and Staunton.

December's new cases surpassed November in 12 days and more than doubled the previous month before Christmas, a third consecutive month of exponential growth. November's 1,182 cases were more than double October's new case number (468).



Augusta Health absorbs COVID patient impact while vaccinating over 1,500

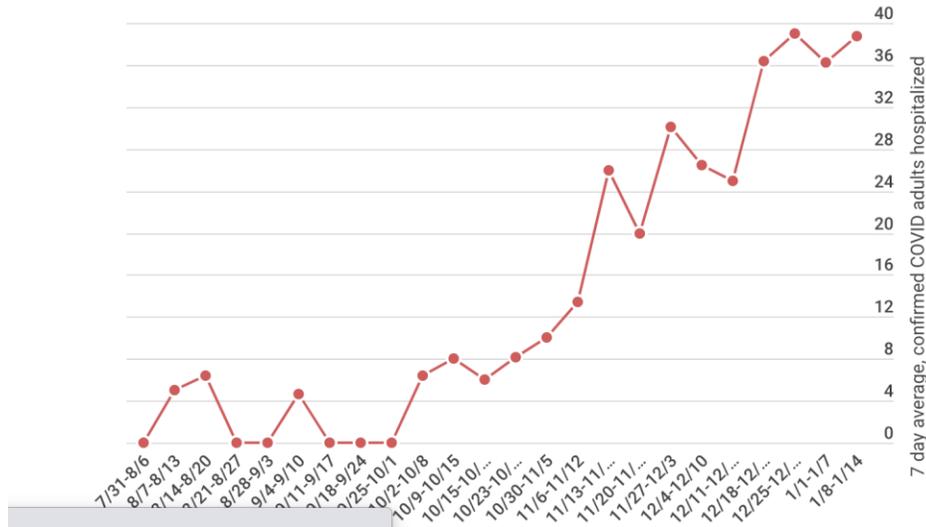
That rising case number heavily impacted local hospital resources. The 7-day average for hospitalized adult COVID patients shot up from 25 to 36.4 after flattening the two weeks before that, according to the latest healthdata.gov report on hospitals, covering the week 12/18-24.

That represents a near-tripling of the average from early November, when the 7-day average of hospitalized adult COVID patients was 10 on Nov. 5.

COVID patients hospitalized at Augusta Health

The line represents the seven-day average of confirmed COVID adult patients hospitalized on any day for that week.

Note: Averages at "zero" may be as high as 4 because reporting is suppressed for numbers fewer than 5.



At the same time, the hospital was busy giving health professionals vaccination shots in the first counter-offensive to stop the spread of the virus. "As of the morning of December 31, Augusta Health has administered 1510 vaccines to healthcare workers since the COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic opened on December 16," a blog post on Augusta Health's website announced.

"Augusta Health's allocation of the Pfizer vaccine has been administered," according to the blog, "and the Clinic is now vaccinating with the Moderna vaccine."

Those who received the first round of shots will have to return for a second round to complete the vaccination process. For the Pfizer vaccine the interval between shots is 21 days; for the Moderna vaccine the interval is 28 days.

That second round of shots for the earliest people vaccinated will begin around Jan. 6.

The Medical Reserve Corps is [seeking volunteers](#) from the community to help with the vaccination effort. Volunteers do not have to be medical professionals.

Over 87,000 Virginians have received the first dose of vaccine as of Jan. 3, according to data from the Virginia Department of Health.

Six-week surge: where local cases grew throughout the county to end the year

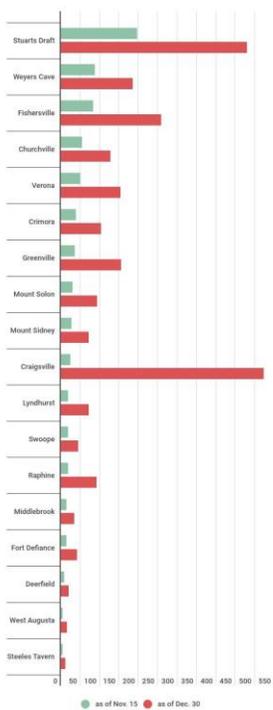
December's cases included outbreaks at Middle River Regional Jail and Augusta Correctional Center, resulting in nearly a third of the month's total. The jail's numbers have been showing up as Staunton cases on the Virginia Department of Health website.

The surge from mid-November to the end of the year shows most areas doubling or tripling their numbers.

Fishersville's cases went from 83 to 258 in the last six weeks of the year. Stuarts Draft cases shot up from 197 cases to 480. Verona cases tripled from 50 to 153.

COVID cases surged in Augusta County from mid-Nov. to Dec. 30

The green bar shows the total number of COVID-19 cases in each zip code on Nov. 15.
The red bar shows the total number of COVID cases in each zip code on Dec. 30.



Source: Virginia Department of Health.

news leader.

January cases continue to climb

Three days into the new year, the surge does not appear to have slowed.

Despite the fact that weekend case numbers are typically depressed, Augusta County has reported 191 new cases Friday, Saturday and Sunday; Staunton 80 new cases, including one death; and Waynesboro 93 new cases.

That's 364 new cases in 2021's first three days, on pace with numbers of the previous four weeks.