

‘Team effort’ led to COVID-19 curbside testing program at Piedmont Urgent Care

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Dr. Steven von Elten, family practice physician with Piedmont Family Practice, was on vacation when the novel coronavirus pandemic spread to Virginia in early March.

He rushed home. “I spent countless hours reading” to research the virus, he said, although at the time there were few resources for how private medical practices – as opposed to hospitals and health departments – could play a role in mitigating the spread of the virus and the disease it causes.

It occurred to him, von Elten said, that PUC might be the ideal location for drive-thru, curbside COVID-19 testing because of its extended hours. “The beauty of [Piedmont Urgent Care] is that we can do 11 hours a day, seven days a week,” he said. Additionally, the curbside model was an optimal one, he said. “Doing curbside protects my employees.”

Supplies of basic items – swabs for testing, personal protective equipment for medical staff -- were very limited at the time, he said, but the need remained to expand testing to identify individuals infected with the virus and thus limit its spread as much as possible.

Getting enough swabs was a challenge, but Piedmont was able to secure commitments from three commercial labs – Sunrise Medical Labs, LabCorp and Quest Diagnostics – to give a total of 250 swabs for the curbside testing program. In return, PUC would use those labs for testing. (A Virginia Department of Health lab in Richmond is used as well, but only for patients who fit a stricter set of criteria. The private labs have more leeway in the patients they are able to test.)

As a result of cooperation among the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District of the Virginia Department of Health, Fauquier Hospital, Fauquier County and Warrenton governments, the PATH Foundation and local physicians – collectively dubbed the Coronavirus Community Task Force -- curbside testing for COVID-19 began on April 6 at Piedmont Urgent Care in Warrenton, a subsidiary of



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

Piedmont Urgent Care nurses stand ready to perform curbside COVID-19 testing.

Piedmont Family Practice.

As of Wednesday, April 8, PUC had sent 37 individuals’ samples out for testing. The turnaround for most tests is two to eight days; for individuals meeting the much stricter VDH criteria, the turnaround is one to two days.

von Elten was pleased with the launch of the program. “The word is out there. This is good. We’re getting screening done.”

“The credit really goes to the Rappahannock-Rapidan VDH epidemiologist April Achter and Regional Medical Director Dr. Wade Kartchner for spearheading this initiative,” von Elten said.

“The screening is intended for symptomatic patients that have been prescreened by their medical provider,” said an April 4 letter by von Elten posted on the Piedmont Family Practice website, though he said that individuals who have been unable to consult their primary care physician could be evaluated by a PUC physician to see if they meet the criteria.

Some creative methods were employed to stock enough PPE to make a curbside testing program feasible, said von Elten. The brother-in-law of a Piedmont physician is an engineer in the Central American mining industry; he was able to send 480 N95 masks for health care workers.

big team effort,” von Elten said.

It took a couple weeks to iron out the details – “You learn to ride a bike as you’re building the bike,” as he put it - but von Elten said he is confident the model in place currently is a workable one.

Through the collective effort, “now we have enough PPE,” he said. Beyond that, “the community has been awesome in producing cloth masks.”

While healthcare staff use medical-grade masks, von Elten said the cloth masks play a role for the general public in mitigating the spread of the virus.

“The beauty of cloth masks is, if I’m out in public, it decreases the amount of virus droplets I’m putting out there,” he said, adding that wearing a mask in public does not completely mitigate the risk of spreading the virus, but it helps. “It’s not 100%, but it’s something,” he said. Some health care workers also wear a cloth mask over their medical-grade masks as an added layer of protection, he said.

He said that the volume of tests being processed by labs, along with the overall strain on the supply chain, limits the number of tests that can be performed in a given amount of time, which is the reason only individuals meeting certain criteria can be tested currently.

“I’d like to screen everybody that I could,” he said.

Reach Coy Ferrell at cferrell@fauquier.com

Drive-thru market delivers freshness



Remington’s Community Garden hosted its first drive-thru farmers market on Saturday, April 11. Organizer Mary Beth Waldeck said about 24 shoppers picked up fresh fruits and vegetables from seven vendors: Watery Mountain Essentials, Happy Family Ranch, Inc., Piney Meadow Farm, Gonzales Farm, Hock Newberry Farm, Fortis Farms and Great Harvest Warrenton. All orders were placed online before the market. Waldeck said the event was such a success that the community garden plans on continuing the market every Saturday, from 11 a.m. to noon.

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ANGELO'S LIST:
HIGHLAND'S BRIZZI HAS
HOOPS OFFERS FROM
ARIZONA, VILLANOVA,
MICHIGAN.
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Caitlin Reams, RN, Piedmont Urgent Care TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL



Doctor: 'No test is 100% reliable'

False negatives in coronavirus tests a concern

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Testing for the novel coronavirus has become exponentially more accessible since the pandemic began.

In Virginia, 43 times more tests were performed during the most recent week than in mid-March. Getting tested before traveling or returning to work has become a routine part of life during the pandemic; some

universities are requiring proof of a negative test result from students before they return to campus this fall.

As of Monday, more than 1 million tests for the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease have been con-

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Former bank manager accused of taking \$100,000 from customers

Staff Reports

A former branch manager of The Plains branch of The Fauquier Bank has been charged with 36 felony counts after allegedly forging withdrawal slips and taking a total of more than \$100,000 from bank customers.



Susan Woolston Wright

On multiple dates from May 2019 to February 2020, Susan Wright of Upperville allegedly forged withdrawal slips from four customers' accounts and removed a total of \$103,573 from those accounts, according to criminal complaints filed July 8 by a Fauquier County Sheriff's Office deputy.

Wright is charged with 16 felony counts of forgery, 16 counts of false uttering and four counts of obtaining money by false pretenses.

Wright turned herself in on July 11 and was released on a \$25,000 secured bond, according to a sheriff's office spokesperson. She will appear in Fauquier County General District Court for a preliminary hearing on Oct. 7. If convicted, Wright could face up to 10 years of prison time for each count.

Her attorney, Joseph Pricone of Mark B. Williams & Associates in Warrenton, said that the law firm will conduct its own investigation of the case and review evidence to best form a defense strategy before the October hearing.



Kayden, 9, of Warrenton, does an ollie at the WARF skate park July 15.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

Students cope with a socially distanced summer

As restrictions relax, young people tiptoe back into some activities

By Angela Roberts
SPECIAL TO THE FAUQUIER TIMES

David Mayfield, 13, must wear a mask inside the Boys & Girls Club of Fauquier in Warrenton. When he goes outside to throw a football with friends, they have to

put on gloves. And when he and his buddies decide to play a game of Knockout, they're only allowed to touch their own basketballs.

Still, he's happy to be at camp. Before it began, he was staying up all night playing video games and sleeping during the day. Camp,

which starts at 9 a.m., has given him back a regular schedule.

"It feels great," he said. "I'm finally seeing sunlight. It's been a long time."

Mayfield has been coming to

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Asymptomatic cases may yield more false negatives

TESTING, from page 1

ducted in Virginia since the pandemic began, including 19,350 in the health district that includes Fauquier County. However, the health director for the Rapidan-Rappahannock Health District and a local physician who oversees a testing program in Warrenton both cautioned that depending on several factors, diagnostic testing – tests that look for the active presence of the virus in an individual – has the potential to miss some infections. That is, a negative test result does not necessarily mean an individual is not infected with the virus.

“For any test to be 100% sensitive is not very common,” said Dr. Wade Kartchner, the health director for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District, which includes Fauquier County, “and when sensitivity of a test falls below 100%, this means that some negative tests are actually cases.” He said that false negatives are sometimes the result of human error, such as swabbing a patient incorrectly. Much of the variability, though, comes from when in relation to the onset of symptoms the test was conducted.

“Research shows that the likeliest time for a test to be positive when a patient actually has a disease is three days after symptoms start,” Kartchner said, elaborating later, “The sensitivity is not great prior to symptom onset, improves to 80% to 90% at around the third day after onset of symptoms, and then starts to decrease again after that.” He explained that, as the infection progresses from the third to the eighth day, the chances that a swab will retrieve enough of the virus’ signature to detect it are good.

Dr. Steven von Elten, a physician at Piedmont Family Practice who administers the coronavirus testing program at Piedmont Urgent Care, expanded on Kartchner’s assessment. Three days before the onset of symptoms, he said, it is highly unlikely a test will detect the presence of the virus, even if an individual has an active infection. Two days before the onset of symptoms, diagnostic testing only detects about 20% of active COVID-19 infections. Be-

“Research shows that the likeliest time for a test to be positive when a patient actually has a disease is three days after symptoms start.”

DR. WADE KARTCHNER

Health director, Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District

cause the virus emerged so recently and large-scale peer-reviewed studies are still relatively few, there is little consensus about the exact detection rate.

The sensitivity rate increases substantially as an individual begins to experience symptoms, von Elton said. If a person is swabbed during the first day, they are experiencing symptoms, the test detects about 60% of cases. By three to eight days after the onset of symptoms, the sensitivity rate rises to 80% or more. “If you’re symptomatic, you still have to stay home and isolate yourself,” von Elten recommended. “No test is 100% reliable.”

The swabbing method itself, von Elten explained, is also key in obtaining results that are as accurate as possible. The nasopharyngeal method used at his clinic is the most reliable method that is practical in a clinical setting, he said.

von Elten said he worries about people who have tested negative getting “cavalier” and not taking precautions to prevent infecting others unknowingly.

Kartchner echoed this sentiment. “[I]f one is sick and has a negative PCR [test], the public health recommendation would still be to stay home until symptom-free for 72 hours.”

Both Kartchner and von Elten said that false positives – when a person tests positive for an infection when they do not actually have that infection present in their body – from diagnostic coronavirus testing are far less common and far less of a problem than false negatives, but are not unheard of.

“Since the PCR test uses unique genetic sequences

are seen inside of our facility tend to present with symptoms,” she said. Other patients who come to the clinic for testing want to be re-tested to verify an earlier result, she said.

The vast majority of tests conducted at Piedmont Urgent Care in recent weeks have been using the rapid antigen method, von Elten said. For instance, on Sunday, all 150 individuals tested opted for the rapid test, and all but a few of the 248 tests conducted on Saturday used this method.

Piedmont Urgent Care is one of five testing sites in Fauquier County, according to the VDH. All are in Warrenton. The others are: Dominion Internal Medicine (225 Oak Springs Drive #201), GoWell Urgent Care (75 W. Lee Highway), Fauquier Free Clinic (35 Rock Pointe Lane) and Piedmont Pediatrics (20 Rock Pointe Lane).

Testing options

There are two main types of diagnostic tests. About 90% of the tests conducted in Virginia so far have been real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, which detect the presence of the RNA structure of the virus itself; samples for these tests are sent to a dedicated lab for analysis. Cases from individuals who test positive for the novel coronavirus from a PCR test are counted as “confirmed” cases by the Virginia Department of Health.

A second type of test diagnostic, “rapid” antigen testing, detects proteins that are present on the surface of the virus; these tests can be conducted on site in about 15 minutes using a specialized machine, but are generally considered less sensitive than PCR tests. The Federal Drug Administration approved the first antigen test in May. In Virginia, positive test results from an antigen test are counted as “probable” cases.

Serology testing, which detects the presence of coronavirus antibodies in the blood, are far less common, less precise and far less useful in tracking the current spread of the virus, according to public health agencies.

of the SARS-CoV2 virus, the specificity can approach 100%. This means that if one tests positive, they can reliably bank on having the illness. The greater issue is the sensitivity, since it relies on timing of the specimen and the technique used,” said Kartchner, adding that false-positive results can still arise from “cross-reactivity” with another strain of coronavirus or from simple human error, like mixing up samples.

“Rapid” antigen tests, Kartchner said, are typically less sensitive than PCR testing but are no more likely to produce a false positive. He said that the recommendation for individuals whose antigen test comes back negative but who are symptomatic is to be tested again with a PCR test.

It is less clear how much value antibody testing -- which measures the body’s response to a past infection and does not look for the infection itself -- is to an individual.

Kartchner explained, for instance, that false negatives from this type of testing can occur because not enough time has passed after an infection for an individual to develop antibodies. False positives can occur because the antibodies developed in response to other coronaviruses are very similar to those developed in response to the coronavirus discovered in 2019.

“A positive test result shows you may have antibodies from an infection with the virus that causes COVID-19,” says the Centers for Disease Control website about antibody testing. “However, there is a chance a positive result means that you have antibodies from an infection with a virus from the same family of viruses (called coronaviruses), such as the one that causes the common cold.”

In any case, there is no understanding so far as to how much – if any – immunity to future infections from the novel coronavirus antibodies provide, Kartchner said.

Rapid tests in high demand

As of Monday, more than 9,000 tests have been conducted at Piedmont Urgent Care, according to Heather Groves, a physician assistant with the practice. Of those, more than 6,000 have been rapid antigen tests, with the remainder being PCR tests that have been sent to a lab.

The rapid test has been available at the clinic since May 28 and remains the only rapid-testing site in the health district. Of those seeking a rapid test, many patients seek that test specifically for work or travel authorizations. “The majority of these patients recently are younger patients who have traveled in large groups together,” Groves explained.

Groves said that generally most patients using the clinic’s curbside testing program are asymptomatic. On the other hand, “Patients that



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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS TARGET WINTER RETURN: VHSL PLAN PASSES 34-1. PAGE 11



Data Stream broadband network set to expand, but some customers say service is unreliable

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

An allocation of \$1.2 million from funds received under the federal CARES Act, along with a \$750,000 grant from the PATH Foundation, may enable Fauquier County's wireless broadband network to expand beyond the 15 sites currently in operation (or planned) under a public-private initiative meant to expand access to fast Internet connections in rural areas of the county.

Supervisor Rick Gerhardt (Cedar Run) indicated that the communications tower adjacent to the CubeSmart storage facility in Amissville is one of the possible locations being explored but that no plan is set in stone. "What people have a hard time understanding is that we're dealing with existing assets," he added. That is, broadcast equipment is being mounted on towers or other high points that already exist, which can be difficult to find in remote areas.

County Administrator Paul McCulla confirmed Monday that the Amissville tower was being considered. The county is also "exploring options" in the Catlett area, he added, "but we have not settled on any locations."

Representatives of Data Stream Mobile Technologies, the firm contracted by the county last year to expand internet access in the county, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

In September 2019, members of the

"Data Stream is doing the best they can, but the customer service leaves a lot to be desired."

JENNIFER COATES

Fauquier County Board of Supervisors approved a multi-million-dollar incentive program with Data Stream; the company would install signal-broadcast equipment on pre-existing towers, county-owned assets and water towers to reach rural areas with few or no other broadband options.

See **BROADBAND**, page 4

Teen suspect in Midland double homicide indicted on two counts of first-degree murder

On Monday, a grand jury indicted Leviathan Norwood, 17, of Midland, on two counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder stemming from the shooting deaths of his mother and brother at their Midland home Feb. 14.

Norwood was also indicted on three counts of using a firearm in the commission of a felony and one count of grand theft of an automobile. According to court records, Norwood remains in custody.

The indictments handed down Monday were processed in Fauquier Circuit Court, indicating that Norwood will be tried as an adult.

The indictments are the first public information about the legal proceedings against Norwood since early March. Norwood's case was initially processed in Fauquier County Juvenile and Domestic Relations General District Court, where proceedings are generally closed, and on March 5 a judge denied a motion to make those court proceedings public.

Norwood is accused of fatally shooting his mother, Jennifer Norwood, and his 6-year-old brother Wyatt in their home. He is also ac-

See **NORWOOD**, page 6

Schools reveal plan for sports, reopening

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

For anyone who had read the Fauquier County Public School's dense 88-page Path to Reopening Plan, there were few surprises revealed at the school board meeting Monday night – until the last minute of "roundtable" time, four-and-a-half hours after the meeting's 6 p.m. start.

School board member Suzanne Sloane (Scott District) announced that the Virginia High School League had voted on a condensed school sports schedule Monday. She said that the first high school sports season of the school year will include "winter" sports (basketball, indoor track, swimming, wrestling) and would begin Dec. 14, with the first contest date Dec. 28.

Sports usually held in the fall (football, cheerleading, cross country, field hockey, golf and volleyball) will begin Feb. 15 to May 1, 2021. The first contest date would be March 1, 2021.

Traditionally "spring" sports (baseball, lacrosse, soccer, softball, tennis and track and field) will be held April 12 to June 26, 2021 – after the last day of school. The first contest date in the spring will be April 26, 2021.

FEA demonstrates for 100% virtual learning

Out in front of Fauquier High School before the school board meeting, 40 or so members of the Fauquier Educators Association – all in masks – demonstrated their concerns with the blended opening



Karen Yergin, eighth-grade teacher at Auburn Middle School, was one of the 40 or so teachers who demonstrated outside Fauquier High School before the school board meeting Monday.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

that the school board approved at its last meeting. Karen Yergin, eighth-grade teacher at Auburn Middle School, said, "I just don't see how we can do it and still be safe."

Kirk Goolsby, who teaches at Northern Virginia Community College and is married to a Brumfield Elementary School reading specialist, argued, "virtual is the only practical way to do it." He predicted that once the schools open, if someone comes down with COVID, they'll have to quarantine the other kids in the class and the teacher, and everyone they've

come in contact with. "It will go virtual anyway, very quickly," he said.

Annaliese Goolsby, 11, who attends Brumfield Elementary, said that she "misses her friends, but it's not worth getting sick."

The reopening plan was revealed in painstaking detail Monday night, but the school administration is braced for hundreds of more questions about specific circumstances. From rules about mask-wearing to accommodations for children in the

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Data Stream broadband network set to expand

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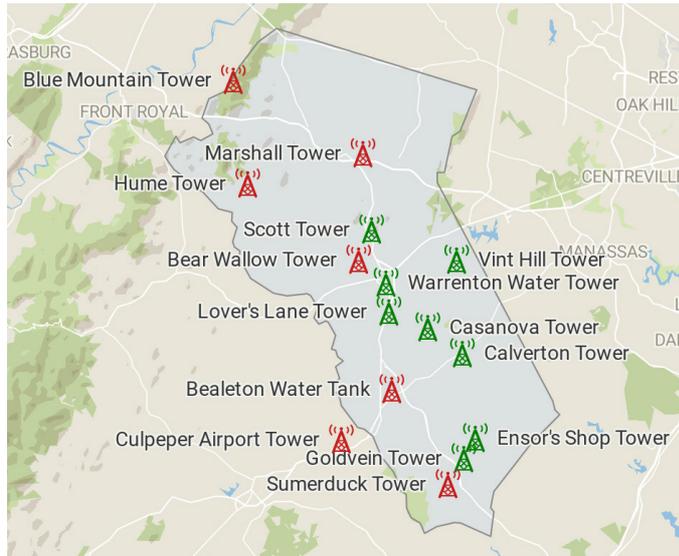
Data Stream signal is currently broadcast for subscribers from eight points in the county. According to Gerhardt, an additional seven broadcast points are set to be operational by September. (See map.)

Data Stream receives \$235,000 for each broadcast site put into operation in addition to reimbursements for rental fees and staffing. County residents receive a discounted rate on monthly for the Internet service, and the county receives 20% of that subscriber revenue.

To date, Fauquier County has paid Data Stream \$2.45 million as part of the initiative, part of about \$3.9 million supervisors have approved for the broadband expansion program, according to Deputy County Administrator Erin Kozanecki. Of the total funding, the PATH Foundation contributed \$460,000 before it announced an additional \$750,000 grant announced this month. The PATH contributions, and more recently federal CARES Act funding, reduce the amount of cash expenditures required of the county, Kozanecki said.

Data Stream customers in Casanova say outages common

In 2018, Dee Dee Kanney, of Casanova, was one of the first custom-



The towers marked in green are currently operational; the ones marked in red are planned.

ers whose home was connected to the broadband signal broadcast from a 145-foot tower on Casanova Road. The tower is “two fields away” from Kanney’s home.

The service, then provided by Omnipoint Technologies – a company that has since been absorbed by Data Stream – “is such a boon,” she told the Fauquier Times in July 2019. Speaking last week, she was far less enthusiastic. “What a difference a year makes,” she said. At first, she emphasized, the internet service was reliable and fast. “Then,” she sighed, “they put up other towers.”

She said that each time a new tower is added to Data Stream’s network, the service at her house gets slower and more unreliable. “It’s been absolutely horrendous. We haven’t had service we can count on at all.” She added that “it seems like it goes

down almost on the hour now,” a reality punctuated each time she tries to use her Alexa smart speaker and it responds, “I am having trouble connecting to the Internet.”

She emphasized repeatedly, however, that she has nothing but good things to say about her many interactions with the company’s support staff. Jennifer Coates, also of Casanova, told a similar story of her experience since she became a Data Stream customer in January. “For the most part, it’s been a positive experience. When it’s working, we love it.”

But it doesn’t always work, she said, sometimes going down for days at a time. Because of this, she pays a monthly fee for a Verizon mobile hotspot as a backup. “Data Stream is doing the best they can,” she said, “but the customer service leaves a lot to be desired.”

Another Casanova resident, Charlene Moore, was one of the first to connect to the tower there in 2018. “The first year or so, it was good,” she said of her experience. “This last year, it’s been terrible, terrible, terrible.” When she spoke to the Fauquier Times Friday, her service had been down for a week.

Her grandson, a student at Lord Fairfax Community College, lives with her and had to travel to find a public Wi-Fi hotspot after their Data Stream service went down during his finals week this spring. Because of the frequent outages, she pays for extra data on her grandson’s phone so he can use it as a hotspot when Data Stream is down. “I’m paying twice,” she said, “just so my grandson can do homework at night.”

Though Data Stream representatives did not respond to requests for comment for this story, a June 21 email to Data Stream customers from Charles Thomas, the company’s director of operations, hinted at service interruptions described by some customers.

“We ... want to thank you for your extreme patience during our network upgrade last week,” the email said. ... Many of you experienced multiple downtimes as the system synced.”

The email promised “high up-time consistent service” going forward but alluded to deficiencies in providing customer service. “We are listening, and we get it. Our customer service area needs additional attention, especially in cases like last week.”

Reach Coy Ferrell at cferrell@fauquier.com

A COVID-19 snapshot

Tuesday, July 28

New cases of coronavirus

Virginia: 922 Tuesday; 86,994 to date

Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District: 1,799

Fauquier: 568

Perspective: Between June 8 and July 9, the state’s new case numbers were consistently below 700, but a surge in cases in Virginia began to appear July 10, when 943 new cases were reported; the daily increase has not been fewer than 900 since July 14, when it was 801. In Fauquier, 144 new cases have been added so far, as compared to June 1 to 28, when the county added a total of 111 new cases.

Seven-day positivity average (total tests vs. positive tests)

Virginia: 7.3%

RRHD: 3.6%

Perspective: In Virginia, on June 28, the rate was 5.8% and has been generally on the rise since then. In the RRHD, the positivity rate was 1.7% on July 1.

Outbreaks

Virginia: 622 total; 310 outbreaks in long-term care settings, 196 in congregate care settings, 47 in correctional facilities, 44 in health care settings and 25 in educational settings.

RRHD: 10 total; 4 outbreaks in long-term care settings, 5 in congregate care settings, 1 in a health care setting.

Hospitalizations

Virginia: 7,267

RRHD: 128

Fauquier: 34

Perspective: Younger adults are becoming ill enough to require acute care. In the health district, 31 people from 50 to 59 have been hospitalized, the largest age group. Twenty-one residents between 40 and 49 were hospitalized, the second largest age group. Eighteen who are aged 30 to 39 were hospitalized as well as 20 who are 60 to 69. Seventeen residents older than 80 years old have been hospitalized. In the state, 1,520 COVID-19 positive residents in the 60 to 69 age group were hospitalized and 1,411 of those aged 50 to 59 were hospitalized. Those were the two age groups with the most hospitalizations.

Deaths

Virginia: 2,095

RRHD: 26

Fauquier: 8

Perspective: In the state, the majority of people who have died have been older than 80 (1,043), compared to 1,050 for all residents 79 and younger. Seventeen people older than 70 have died in the health district, while nine under 70 have died.



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To practice social distancing, one-hour timed tickets for a self-guided tour of the Museum must be reserved in advance online. No tickets will be sold on-site. Tickets are by timed-entry and are limited in order to maintain safe capacity. Ticket times are 11am for Museum Member Mornings and 2pm for General Admission on Fridays and Saturdays. To visit the Library for general reading, research or study time please contact our George L. Ohrstrom Jr. Head Librarian for an appointment.

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We will continue to evaluate and provide updates as to when and how we can safely expand our capacity.

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