

# Let's be safe! Wear a mask — the Gadfly you save might be your own

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus July 2, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus 

*Ford Turner and Jon Harris, “New Pennsylvania mask order requires everyone to wear one whenever leaving home in certain circumstances.” Morning Call, July 1, 2020.*

*from Ford Turner. Daniel Patrick Sheehan and Kay;a Dwyer, “Green doesn’t always mean go: Some Lehigh Valley officials see coronavirus trouble brewing in crowded public spaces.” Morning Call, July1 , 2020.*

Just a few months ago, a photo of a crowd milling outside Molly’s Irish Sports Bar and Grille would have been too mundane to attract comment.

But that was before the coronavirus. The photo of tightly packed, mostly unmasked customers outside the Bethlehem bar on Friday night set off alarms in a community warily coming back to life on the first day of the [green phase of Gov. Wolf’s pandemic reopening plan](#). The photo blew up on social media and prompted an apology from the bar, which closed early on Saturday night to avoid a repeat.

What made the episode troubling was the fact that similar gatherings in Allegheny County are believed to have driven a spike in infection rates so significant that officials banned drinking in bars and restaurants.

To this point, no one is predicting the Lehigh Valley is in store for the same kind of spike, though a rise in Lehigh County’s case rate in June prompted the state Health Department to include the county in a “deep dive” into data from areas where spikes might be brewing. More recently, there has been a slight uptick in new, confirmed cases in Northampton County.

At Molly’s, owner Charles Patrick said things were under control Friday when he left around 10 p.m., with a manageable flow of masked customers coming in and out and indoor capacity limited to 50%.

Then, around midnight, local college students started coming out, Patrick said. “That’s when it got crazy,” he said, noting that many customers refused staff requests that they don masks. “We’re going to do everything in our power to quell the onslaught,” said Patrick, who is making a number of changes to scheduling and seating to better manage crowds. “I’m only one establishment. These are the things we are doing to fix our problem.”

Some Northampton County numbers have been ticking up, the dashboard shows, with 90 cases in the most recent seven day period compared with 68 in the previous period. Cases per 100,000 residents rose from 22.3 to 29.5. Statewide, cases per 100,000 residents rose from 23.2 to 28.7 over the last seven days. Of those who have tested positive statewide to date, nearly 37 % are ages 25-49.

Wardle said the Northampton uptick was mostly due to new cases in long-term care facilities. A reason new-case numbers at those facilities are surging, Wardle said, is that Gov. Tom Wolf has required that all residents of all facilities be tested for the virus by July 24 under Wolf’s “universal” testing regimen. More testing, Wardle said, uncovers more cases.

Hence, he said, the concern over Northampton isn’t great, but the state will continue to assist its long-term care facilities — which have been epicenters of outbreaks nationally — and monitor the situation.

Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure said he is fiercely proud of residents for obeying lockdown rules and driving down infection numbers, which could have been far higher given the county’s proximity to the hotspots of New York, New Jersey and the greater Philadelphia area.

He said he doesn’t want to see that success undone by growing laxity over the vital prevention protocols of hand washing, social distancing and mask-wearing. “We have to balance the public health with avoiding another shutdown, because the economy can’t bear it,” he said. “Wear a mask. I don’t care where you are or what you’re doing. Wear a mask.”

You’ll find a statement by the Molly’s owner in our next post in this series.