

# Niagara County offers update on COVID-19 cases

Niagara County Public Health Director Daniel J. Stapleton on Thursday afternoon released the following statement regarding the three positive COVID-19 test results the Niagara County Department of Health received from the New York State Health Department. These three individuals live in western Niagara County, which includes Niagara Falls and the towns of Niagara, Lewiston and Porter.

"I recognize the public wants as much information as possible as soon as possible. We are doing our best to get that out," he said. "Our initial priority is quarantining those who were in close, regular contact with these individuals, because that is the key to reducing community spread. With three cases, that effort is taking time, but our team is working hard. A full contact trace that looks back at all the places an individual has been will take between 24 and 48 hours and will be released as soon as we can. At this time, we cannot say for sure if the disease was contracted through community spread or exposure through travel to a hot zone, but all signs seem to be pointing toward community spread."

He said this is the information known at this time:

- An 83-year-old man tested positive at Mount St. Mary's. He has underlying health complications and is currently in a local health care facility.

- A 62-year-old man, who tested positive at a Kaleida facility, does not have any apparent underlying health complications. He is currently isolating at home.

- A 62-year-old female tested positive at a Kaleida facility. It is unknown at this time about any underlying health condition. She is isolating at home.

Stapleton said none of these individuals were under Niagara County Health Department quarantine, and none are connected to each other.

As of Thursday, there are 42 individuals in quarantine and four in isolation, including these three new positives.

The Health Department is still waiting on five pending test results.

Mount St. Mary's issued the following statement on Thursday evening: "There is a patient at Mount St. Mary's Hospital who has tested positive for COVID-19. The hospital is working with the Niagara County Department of Health, New York State Department of Health and CDC following all guidelines for treating and isolating patients with suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19. Catholic Health has a team of Infection Prevention & Control Specialists who are managing this situation and ensuring the safety of other patients and staff at the hospital. Due to HIPAA privacy

laws, we cannot release any other information about the patient."

In addition, a spokeswoman included the new visitation policy, which states, "With the presence of Coronavirus in Western New York, Catholic Health is implementing a new visiting policy to protect the health and safety of our patients, visitors and staff."

"Effective March 18, 2020, all hospital visitation is suspended."

"Exceptions will be made for patients receiving end-of-life care or who have had a change in their health status; and for fathers, spouses and life partners of maternity patients."

"Under these special circumstances, one visitor will be allowed per patient."

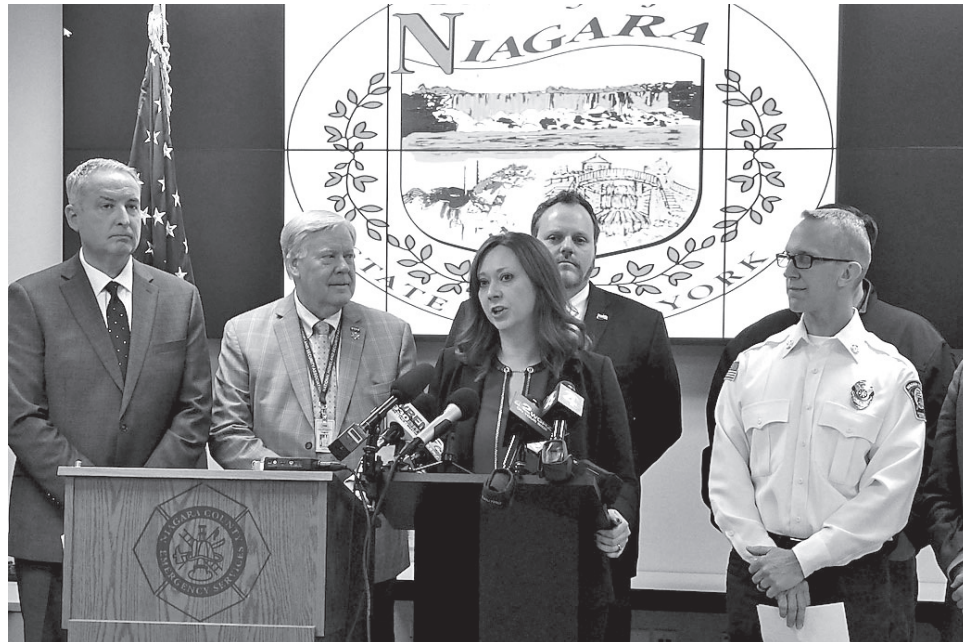
"All visitors will need to submit to a verbal health screening and temperature scan."

"These measures are being taken to limit the spread of Coronavirus in our community and to ensure we are able to care for those who are sick or injured."

"We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and thank you for your cooperation and understanding."

At a press conference on Wednesday, Stapleton outlined a number of measures the county is implementing to help to tackle this issue. He spoke briefly about the recent agreement between Eastern Niagara Hospital and Niagara County to use the former Newfane Intercommunity Hospital to house quarantined individuals. He said the facility could hold 32 people and would be ready to go "today" if necessary.

Stapleton also insisted after the press conference that drive-thru testing sites were all but ready to be rolled out. However, the major hurdle the county is facing is a lack of testing kits.



Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh addresses the media.

"We expect that there are a number of positive cases that have not yet been identified due to the lack of available supplies to do testing," Stapleton said. Elsewhere, he added: "We have difficulty being able to provide more than, say, a half a dozen tests a day."

Stapleton said the county had previously ordered over 1,500 swab testing kits from the state but that they are currently on backorder. He said there has been very little in the way of assurances or timelines from state officials, saying the county has merely been told that it is "in the queue." When asked by a reporter what that means, Stapleton shook his head and responded, "Exactly."

Elsewhere, Stapleton stressed the proper protocols people should follow if they believe they have symptoms of COVID-19. People are urged to call their primary care physician, or the county Coronavirus hotline at 858-

2929. There's also a state phone line at 1-888-364-3065.

Stapleton reiterated that people with symptoms should not go immediately to doctor's offices or an emergency room without direction from health care officials as it could spread the virus to those environments.

The first positive case was announced Tuesday.

On Thursday morning, Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh released a statement that said, "As has already been made public, at approximately 4:30 p.m. on March 17, the Niagara County Health Department was notified by the New York State Health Department of a positive test result for COVID-19 in a 42-year-old female residing in western Niagara County."

"Our communicable disease investigation team immediately began their investigation and now, after one full day of work, they believe they have an accurate picture of the affected individual's community contact."

"This investigation included multiple interviews with the affected individual. She began showing symptom on March 8 and immediately began quarantining herself. Our clinical team reviewed one full week before she was symptomatic to the present. Based on the interviews and timeline, and thanks in large part to the affected individual's actions to quickly quarantine herself, distance herself from family members and seek medical attention,

the Niagara County Department of Health is confident she did not have any community contact during this period. This means no shopping, no public transportation, no work, nor any other outside interactions. The only contact was with family."

"As such, much of our team's effort over the last day has involved personally contacting those who had been in direct contact with this individual at a personal gathering and instituting quarantines. These people will now be closely monitored, but at this point, none are showing any symptoms."

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