

Community Weekly

3.8.21

One-Year Observance of First Known VA COVID-19 Case

By Cynthia Morrow, MD, MPH

It has been almost one year since we learned of the first known case of COVID-19 in Virginia. As we commemorate this solemn anniversary and honor what we have lost, it is also important to reflect on what we have accomplished and what we can look forward to. Let us take stock of where we are by celebrating the past accomplishments of the incredibly challenging year we have all had, and by looking forward to the joy of what lies ahead of us.

Partnerships: One of the most important accomplishments over the past year has been building meaningful partnerships. Understandably, many people in our communities remain focused on when they will be able to get vaccinated. The Roanoke City & Alleghany Health Districts will continue to work in partnership with healthcare systems, healthcare providers, emergency managers, local officials, community-based organizations and volunteers in order to get shots in arms as quickly, safely, and efficiently as possible.

Decreasing COVID-19 activity: Last week, we celebrated our sixth consecutive week of declining COVID-19 activity in our health districts after reaching peak activity in January. Despite this wonderful news, as spring beckons us to plan gatherings, now is not the time to relax our prevention practices. Research has confirmed that wearing masks, maintaining six feet of distance from others, and hand-washing have the power to reduce the transmission of the disease. The guidance has not changed: avoid crowds, wear a mask, stay home when you are sick, and take the vaccine that is available to you when it is your turn.

Vaccine: This week is our twelfth straight week of vaccine clinics. At times, it feels like it was just yesterday that we received our first shipment of vaccine, and at times it feels like we have been holding vaccine clinics forever. Based on data reported to the Virginia Department of Health, over 90,000 vaccines (including both first and second doses) have been administered to the Roanoke City and Alleghany Health Districts' residents through our efforts and the efforts of our partners. That is truly something to celebrate.

Virginia Army National Guard: Five members of the Virginia Army National Guard (VANG) have been posted to our districts for the past several weeks to support our vaccination efforts in the community. Last week we welcomed 38 more VANG members to support our Salem and Berglund vaccination clinics. Their skills were quickly put into good use this past weekend as troops spectacularly planned and executed traffic flow at large drive-through clinics at the Berglund Center. With the support of VANG and volunteers, our partner Carilion Clinic vaccinated approximately 8,000 people this weekend.

Projections: Based on the most recent information, we are expecting to see a very significant increase in our vaccine supply by the end of March. If the supply is delivered as predicted, we can expect that most of the population who wants to get vaccinated will have the opportunity to do so by the end of May. This means that we may even be able to reclaim our summer- now surely that is something to really celebrate!

The past year has challenged us in ways we could not have imagined. By continuing to follow our community mitigation strategies and by getting vaccinated when it is our turn, together, we have much to look forward to.