

RCAHD Community Weeklies

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Each week's Tuesday news briefing with local reporters begins with a roundup of the latest COVID-19 statistics in the Roanoke City & Alleghany Health Districts (RCAHD). We share information on the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in each RCAHD locality, hospitalizations, and other data that help to describe the toll the pandemic has taken here in our own backyard. Sometimes the data are encouraging, such as the recent downturn trend in infection rates over the last several weeks. Sometimes the data are heartbreaking, as we recently shared that more than 300 of our friends and neighbors have succumbed to this deadly disease in the past year.

The challenges of gathering reliable data in this pandemic have been great. Accurate reporting involves the work of epidemiologists, case investigators, data managers, hospital staff, laboratories, testing centers, and more. Yet even with the conscientious efforts of many dedicated professionals, it is easy to become overwhelmed and numb to the meaning of all the digits. Numbers don't capture the sense of loss of a beloved grandparent who resided in a nursing home, a loss made all the more painful by quarantines prohibiting family visits. It is also difficult to describe the hardship suffered by employees and owners when one of our local businesses is forced to close or the challenges parents face with home-schooling their children. It is important that each of you knows that you are not a number to me or any member of the RCAHD staff.

Despite these limitations, we do use data to paint a picture of the impact that COVID-19 has had on our community. And we use data to inform difficult decisions, such as how to determine who will receive the 3,150 precious doses of vaccine our district receives each week. We use data to inform us as to who is pre-registered and who is least likely to be able to navigate the pre-registration process. We use data to inform us about who is most at risk for serious disease-- or even death-- from COVID-19 and who is most likely to be exposed to the disease.

While we rely on data to understand COVID-19's impact and to identify vaccine distribution strategies, we also use data to improve our ability to serve you. We have struggled to meet the demand for information about these decisions and have not been able to personally respond to all of the inquiries and requests we have recently received. For this I am sorry. We are dedicated to continuing to improve the way we communicate about opportunities to schedule a vaccine appointment, about testing events, and about other important aspects of the RCAHD. Every decision we make is driven by data and our commitment to serve you to the best of our ability.

This week marks some good news in the effort to provide better customer service to those who are currently seeking vaccination appointments. The Virginia Department of Health has created a new statewide Vaccine Pre-Registration System to provide a unified and comprehensive process for Virginians to pre-register for the COVID-19 vaccine. If you previously filled out our

RCAHD website form indicating your interest in vaccine, your data were automatically imported into the new system and you do not need to pre-register again. This system, combined with an expanded central call center, promises to help our citizens verify that they are in the system, and will help to ensure that callers can get timely assistance with questions and pre-registration.

Last week we celebrated the delivery of over 11,000 first and second doses into the arms of RCAHD residents, a milestone achieved through the hard work of RACHD and Carilion staff with the help of an army of community volunteers. This week, as we continue to focus on reaching our older citizens, especially those in communities of color, as well as the top three tiers of essential workers in Phase 1B, we will look forward to celebrating our improved ability to serve you.