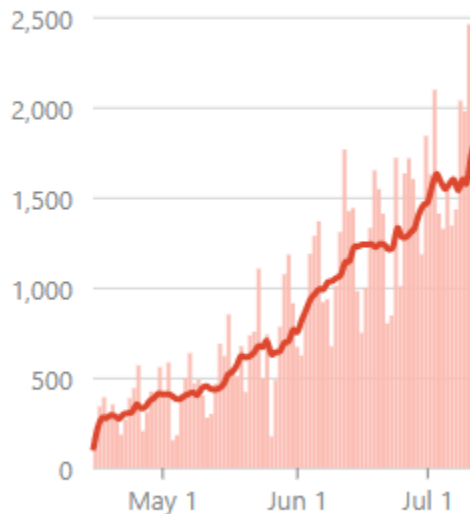


It's Up to Us

One of the biggest concerns for us in Pamlico County is not what is happening in our county or in North Carolina, but the rapid spike in case counts we see happening in other states. Our current situation with COVID-19 in Pamlico County and in NC is not good, but it is not out of control - yet. The number of cases in the state continues to climb, while the percentage of tests that are coming back positive is remaining relatively stable at about 9 to 11%. That means the absolute number of cases is going up, but the rate of growth is not. So we have linear growth, but as of now, not exponential growth in the number of cases.

North Carolina Case Count

Last 90 days
as of 7.13.2020 7 pm



Source: covidtracking.com

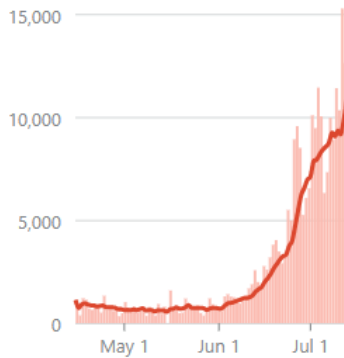
To be clear: North Carolina's positive rate of 11% on July 14 is not low enough and has increased in the last few days. Experts tell us that we need to get it down to half that to stabilize our case rate, and even lower to defeat this virus. It's a bad situation, but the larger point is that it could easily - and rapidly - become worse.

We know this just from looking around.

- Florida is at a 19% positive rate
- Arizona is at 27%.
- South Carolina is at 18%.

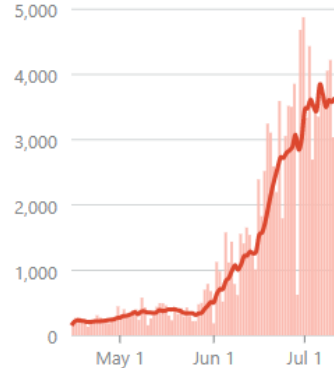
That's why their new case charts look like this.

Florida Case Count
Last 90 Days
as of 7.13.2020 7 pm



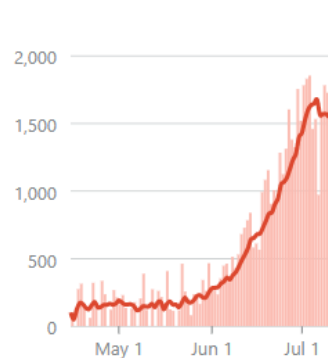
Source: covidtracking.com

Arizona Case Count
Last 90 Days
as of 7.13.2020 7 pm



Source: covidtracking.com

South Carolina Case Count
Last 90 days
as of 7.13.2020 7 pm



Source: covidtracking.com

If we see this kind of explosive growth in our state, everything changes. The reopening conversations we're having right now will simply stop. Personal and family behavior will have to dramatically change. Hospitalizations will increase, and eventually so will deaths. And lots of people will likely suffer or die. And this will be **because of our own behaviors**, not because of the government.

People are rebelling against isolation, and against science and public health. We want the old world back, the pre-Covid-19 world back, but that is simply impossible. We are picking fights with each other instead of fighting the virus. The virus doesn't feel frustration or react to it. It's not aware of your children or your job or your vacation plans. It's not aware of our politics.

The virus is a virus, mindless, and in this case, incredibly efficient and effective. It will pass from person to person for as long as that is possible. It cannot live without us. It feeds and survives because our behaviors enable it to do so. Debate over avoiding gatherings and wearing masks are human concerns, ones that work to the virus's benefit.

WHICH BRINGS UP A QUESTION:

Do we have any weapons for fighting COVID-19 that are more effective than masks, hand washing and social distancing, along with testing and contact tracing?

No. We do not.

These are our most effective weapons. If we ignore even one of them, we have a serious problem. We need to fully use all five weapons to keep this from getting further out of control, and ultimately to defeat it. And the fact is, we ALL have to use these weapons, not just some of us -- or the virus will continue to win.

As our local and state leaders consider school and business reopening policy, the issue isn't just what the situation is right now. **The issue is how quickly things could get worse**, and we don't have to speculate about that. All we have to do is look around. We are in a better position than some other states. They simply don't have as many options as we do right now.

But, in order to preserve our options, we have to recognize how close we are to a tipping point - to finding ourselves in a much worse position. We need to be aware and guard against that. What can we do to keep Pamlico and NC on the road to recovery?

- **Wear a mask whenever you are in public. Always.** Adm. Brett Giroir, U.S. Asst. Secty. For Health and Human Services said on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday: "We have to have people wearing a mask in public. It's absolutely essential...And for this to work, we have to have like 90 percent of people wearing a mask in public."
- **Support local businesses** by wearing a mask when patronizing them and using the low contact options as they provide for conducting business with them. Wearing masks will help businesses open sooner and safely!
- **Local businesses need to do their part** too, by ensuring that they follow NCDHHS guidelines, including ensuring that all employees wear masks.
- **Avoid large gatherings** (including family members that do not live with you) - maintain safe distance from others - wash your hands frequently
- **Get tested.** If you are in a job that results in frequent contact with lots of people, if you have been in a large gathering (over 10 people inside or 25 outside), if you don't feel well, or if you are in a high risk group, get tested. (See more detail about who should be tested [here.](#))
- **Keep track of your interactions** with others. If you receive a call from a contact tracer, answer the phone and answer their questions about who else you have been in contact with - rapidly. Rapid contact tracing saves lives.

This is an enemy that can multiply faster than we can defend and if we pretend otherwise, even for just a few weeks, it could easily re-write the whole script.

We still have the ability to avoid that in North Carolina and most especially, in Pamlico County. We just have to learn from the mistakes of others and make sure we don't repeat them. We are the masters of our behaviors. **It is up to us.**

This commentary was inspired by and borrows comments from opinion columns from NC Senator Jeff Jackson and Columnist Charles Blow. Statistics are from NCDHHS, the COVID Tracking Project and Johns Hopkins:
<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard>, <https://covidtracking.com/> and <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/individual-states/florida>



The COVID-19 Community Task Force (CCTF) is a volunteer organization established to engage the community in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and to support and augment the County's efforts. The information shared by the CCTF is not an official communication from Pamlico County, its Health Department or the Pamlico County COVID19 Task Force.