



Champlain Orchards in Shoreham on Monday, October 5, 2020. Photo by Glenn Russell/VTDigger

Virus outbreak at a Shoreham orchard contained, state officials say



By Erin Petenko

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State officials repeated assurances Tuesday that a coronavirus outbreak at a Shoreham orchard is contained after the number of employees who tested positive for the virus rose only from 26 to 27.

The outbreak at Champlain Orchards was contained to the site and customers and local residents were not in danger from the virus, said Dr. Mark Levine, head of the Department of Health. The 27 workers were at the tail-end of a 14-day quarantine after arriving from Jamaica, he said. The virus spreads quickly and easily among people who live in close quarters, he said.

“People do not get sick because they are from a certain place, or they are of a certain ethnicity or nationality, they get sick if they’re exposed to the virus,” he said.

So far, 101 workers at the orchard had been tested, he said. One was hospitalized. The spike in Covid growth today was not worrying because the growth rate was not sustained, said Mike Peciak, head of the Department of Financial Regulation, who presented the state’s latest coronavirus model. However, his data showed the states around Vermont — particularly New York, Massachusetts and the province of Quebec — are in the midst of another surge in cases. There has been a 49% increase in confirmed cases in the Northeast in the past week, [according to his presentation](#).

The number of people allowed to travel to Vermont without quarantine has reached a new low under the state’s [travel restrictions map](#). No counties in Connecticut, New Jersey or Delaware are in the “green zone” to come to Vermont. Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maryland are down to one county each.

With and without masks

Gov. Phil Scott and other officials wore matching masks to the press conference today to commemorate “Vermont Mask Day,” a day of awareness about the needs for masks and a weeklong series of events about masks. Concerns about masking at events came up as officials addressed a photo of a [maskless wedding at the Woodstock Inn](#) that has gone viral.

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Scott said he was concerned when he saw the photo, and said he told officials to contact the Woodstock Inn to make sure it was complying with the law. Public Safety Commissioner Michael Schirling said the inn had been in close contact with the Agency of Commerce for weeks to ensure compliance for the wedding, its first of this size since the pandemic began.

The wedding, attended by about 100 people, screened guests on arrival for temperatures and had assigned seating by people's pod, he said. "They're laterally distanced in those pods by about 6 feet, but things did appear to have fallen down a bit" in the distance between rows. The state has worked with the venue to make sure it will follow better procedures in the future, he said.

Scott also expressed concern about President Donald Trump, who tested positive for the coronavirus, was hospitalized, and appeared at the White House Monday to address the public, without a mask. Until there's a vaccine, wearing a mask is "really the only thing we have to fight this," Scott said. "Wearing a mask is altruistic, and it's something that I believe is necessary to prevent the spread," he said.

Flu season is coming

Health officials have urged Vermonters to get the flu vaccine to simplify confusion over overlap between the flu and Covid-19. And so far, Vermonters have listened to that guidance.

Nearly 36,000 people have been vaccinated so far this fall, compared to about 30,000 at the same point last year, according to the state's presentation — a 21% increase.

Still, that's only a small percentage of the state's 2020 goal of 325,000 Vermonters vaccinated this season. Pieciak pointed to [data](#) that showed the state had spikes in flu cases from January to March in previous years.

February has typically been the peak of the state's flu season, but spikes have occurred in October and November as well, the data showed. "All the more reason to get your flu shot," Pieciak said.

"So anything that we can do to get those numbers down so that there is more hospital availability for anyone that might need Covid treatment, particularly when national forecasts and cases in the region are going up, you want to make sure that there's enough possible capacity to treat everyone with the flu, but also anyone with Covid as well," he said.

PPE minimum for 90 days

Seven months into the pandemic, Vermont has distributed 3.4 million items of personal protective equipment, including gloves and gallons of hand sanitizer, Schirling said at the press conference.

The state has delivered PPE to workers across the state: Teachers, school nurses, rescue workers, Covid testers, mass transit employees, polling places and corrections workers are among the people to get supplies, he said.

But demand continues to run high and supply lines are "constrained for some items," he said. The state has mostly met its goal of having a 60-day stock of PPE on hand, but doesn't have quite enough N-95 masks to meet that target. Surgical gowns and nitrile gloves are also limited, he said.

The state initially aimed to have 450 ventilators to deal with Covid cases, but has reduced that goal to 120 ventilators because of Vermont's success with the virus and the limited availability of the machines, which help severe Covid patients keep breathing. Of those, 83 have arrived and the rest remain on order.

Even with 72 new cases this week, 27 of them due to an outbreak among apple pickers at Champlain Orchards in Shoreham, "We still have the lowest seven-day infection rate in the country," said Pieciak.