

Is Our Curve Flattening Out in Warren County?

On Sunday, April 19, Governor Cuomo stated that: “If the trend holds, we are past the high point” of the current novel coronavirus epidemic in New York State. Indeed, the trend has held. On Friday, May 8, he said “We have the beast on the run...because we have been smart, and because we have been disciplined.” That analysis provides us all with a good deal of hope. It is important to point out, however, that he has been looking at the numbers for the entire state, which of course are hugely dominated by those of New York City and immediate vicinity, the worst numbers in the world.

How does Cuomo’s statement apply to us in Warren County? What is our trend? And specifically, can we look forward to a loosening of the social distance rules here where we live? And if so, how soon?

To answer those questions on the basis of science, we really need testing data to determine how much of the virus SARS-CoV-2 there is in our community. It is an embarrassment how slowly our nation has been able to provide testing, even of all people who have symptoms suggesting COVID-19, let alone what we really need: wide-spread testing for evidence of the virus across communities like ours including people who have no symptoms. Without such data we have no solid information on how many of us are entertaining the virus, with or without symptoms. Until we have it, we are flying at least partly blind.

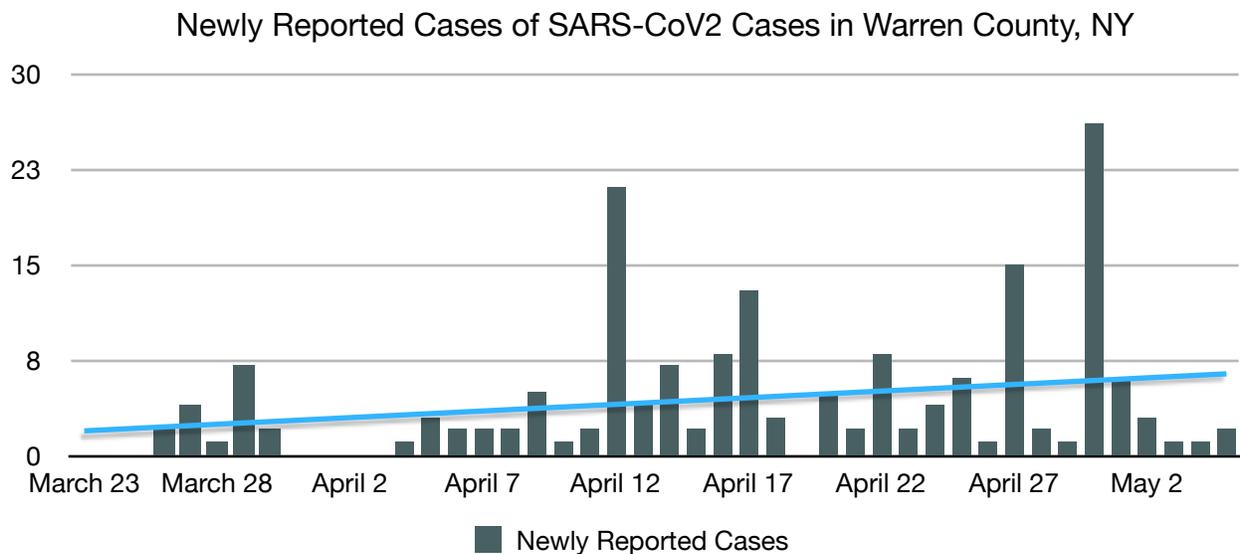
Happily, testing is now more widely available here. Since April 10, one can get a test at the Warren County Municipal Center if one has a doctor’s order. Since May 5, the test has also been available at various Hudson Headwaters locations. This is a test taken from the nose to detect footprints of the virus itself, that is its RNA.

Additionally, New York State had a program last month testing 3,000 randomly selected volunteers who did not have symptoms to see whether they have any experience with the virus. This was a different type of test - it was a blood test to determine whether a person had antibody in the blood that might indicate he or she had had the infection, perhaps without even knowing it. There are actually several different such antibody tests now being marketed for more wide-spread use, but not one of them is reliable enough yet to rely on for what we need to answer the above questions.

The State’s preliminary antibody testing information, for what its worth, suggests something like 3% of our population here in Warren county has antibodies - meaning about 2000 of us have been infected. We hope that also means these folks are protected from reinfection. Sadly, we are not even sure of that yet. The bigger point, however, is that something like 97% or about 62,000 of us, have no antibody. That means we are susceptible to be infected by this highly contagious virus if we let our guards down.

Below, I have attached a graph of the new cases that have been identified in Warren County during the months of March, April and early May on the basis of symptoms and a positive test for the RNA of the virus in the nose. The numbers are really too few to show for sure that we are getting worse. although the light blue “trend line” is indeed going slowly up. It is true that we no doubt are identifying more cases because we are doing more testing, so maybe we are holding steady...perhaps at the top of the curve. But for sure the cases are continuing to come.

Note again that our data here is different from that of the New York State in general. Consider that SARS-CoV-2 is crawling up north from the “epicenter” of New York City, and we in Warren Co are maybe 3 weeks behind downstate. Therefore, we here can’t



say for sure that “we are past high point.” I point out this uncertainty a bit sadly for us all. I am doing so because I don’t want people to expect on the basis of hope alone that we can loosen up our social distancing anytime soon. To do so safely, we should have at least a couple of weeks of data telling us that the virus is circulating minimally if at all in our community. Loosen up too soon and we accept counting each day a larger number of infections and accompanying deaths among neighbors or friends or family.

So for now we have to stay smart and keep the odds of spreading the virus as low as possible. Stay home. Wash your hands. Keep your hands away from your face. When you go out, do the social distancing thing: don’t touch people, stay at least 6 feet away from others, wear masks whenever you are around anybody. And prepare yourself that when we do begin to open we must remain separated by 6 feet, masked and fastidious about our hands.

As time goes by, I can add to the graph and keep us all updated on our trends. Let’s all hope for better data. Until then stay safe. Please.

Richard P. Leach,MD
May 11, 2020