

'More concerned than ever'



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Despite state experts issuing another push for people to wear face masks and stay 6 feet apart in public, many across South Carolina have ignored the advice and continued to gather in groups without personal protective equipment.

Experts warn virus a serious threat as SC continues to reopen

20 new cases in Pickens County on record day

COLUMBIA — South Carolina set a record for new confirmed COVID-19 cases for the second day in a row on Friday, according to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

After 687 new cases were recorded Wednesday, 770 new cases were confirmed Thursday, state officials said.

In Pickens County, 20 new cases were reported Friday, giving it 262 total cases since the pandemic began.

Also on Friday, three new cases were reported in Oconee County, increasing its total number of positive tests to 73.

— The Journal staff

BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — With state health experts expressing dire concerns about the sudden and seemingly unchecked spread of COVID-19 in the Upstate, a renewed plea for social distancing and face masks has been issued.

"Today I am more concerned about COVID-19 in South Carolina than I have ever been before," S.C.

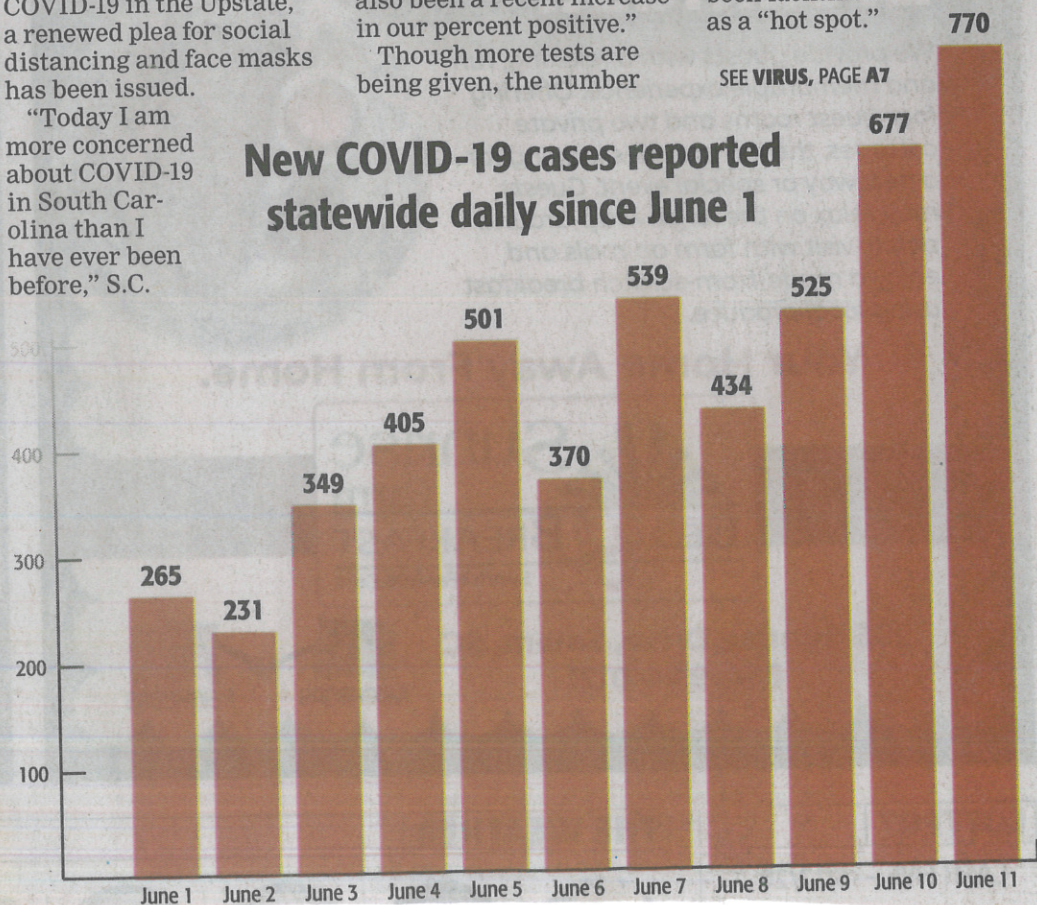
Department of Health and Environmental Control epidemiologist Dr. Linda Bell said Wednesday. "For the past two weeks, we've seen some of our highest daily numbers since the pandemic began, and there has also been a recent increase in our percent positive."

Though more tests are being given, the number

coming back positive for COVID-19 shows "more people than we would hope" are sick, Bell said. Widespread testing is starting to show just how widespread the virus is, and Greenville County has been identified as a "hot spot."

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New COVID-19 cases reported statewide daily since June 1



VIRUS: 'Has certainly slowed us'

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"Greenville County has seen some of the highest daily case counts for any county in the state for over a week and a half," Bell said.

With 770 new cases announced Friday, South Carolina broke its previous record daily high by nearly 100, but Gov. Henry McMaster said he has no intent to close businesses, require masks or limit gathering sizes in an effort to slow the spread.

Bowling alleys were allowed to reopen Friday, and restrictions on the number of people allowed in stores were also removed.

"South Carolinians know what they can do to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, and it's incumbent upon each and every one of us to follow the advice and recommendations of the public health experts," McMaster said in a news release.

But it's clear to Bell that South Carolinians aren't following that advice and continue to gather in groups and not self-isolate after exposure. The explosive uptick in new cases falls shortly after the Memorial Day holiday.

"It doesn't take hard data to observe that many people across the state

aren't social distancing and aren't avoiding group gatherings and aren't using masks in public, and we really need all South Carolinians to take these precautions every day," she said.

With another holiday known for backyard cookouts and lake gatherings around the corner, she reiterated the push for wearing masks and staying 6 feet apart — not one or the other — in an effort to return to normal "sooner rather than later."

"Your community might not be a hot spot today, but there should be no mistake that COVID-19 transmission is still high and widespread in South Carolina at this time, and it remains a threat to all of us."

and widespread in South Carolina at this time, and it remains a threat to all of us," Bell said. "The preventative measures that we are encouraging are really the only things that we have right now to keep us safe in the absence of a vaccine."

The push for personal accountability in prevention, despite cities and businesses returning to regular routines of hosting social events, seems to be the only method McMaster will consider, despite acknowledging the effectiveness of closures and limited capacities in buildings.

"The virus has certainly

slowed us down, and we can't stop and remain shuttered or restricted much longer," McMaster said at a Wednesday press conference. "At this point, the answer is individual responsibility — it's not mandates by the government. Everyone needs to remind their neighbors this is a serious thing."

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Dr. Linda Bell

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control epidemiologist