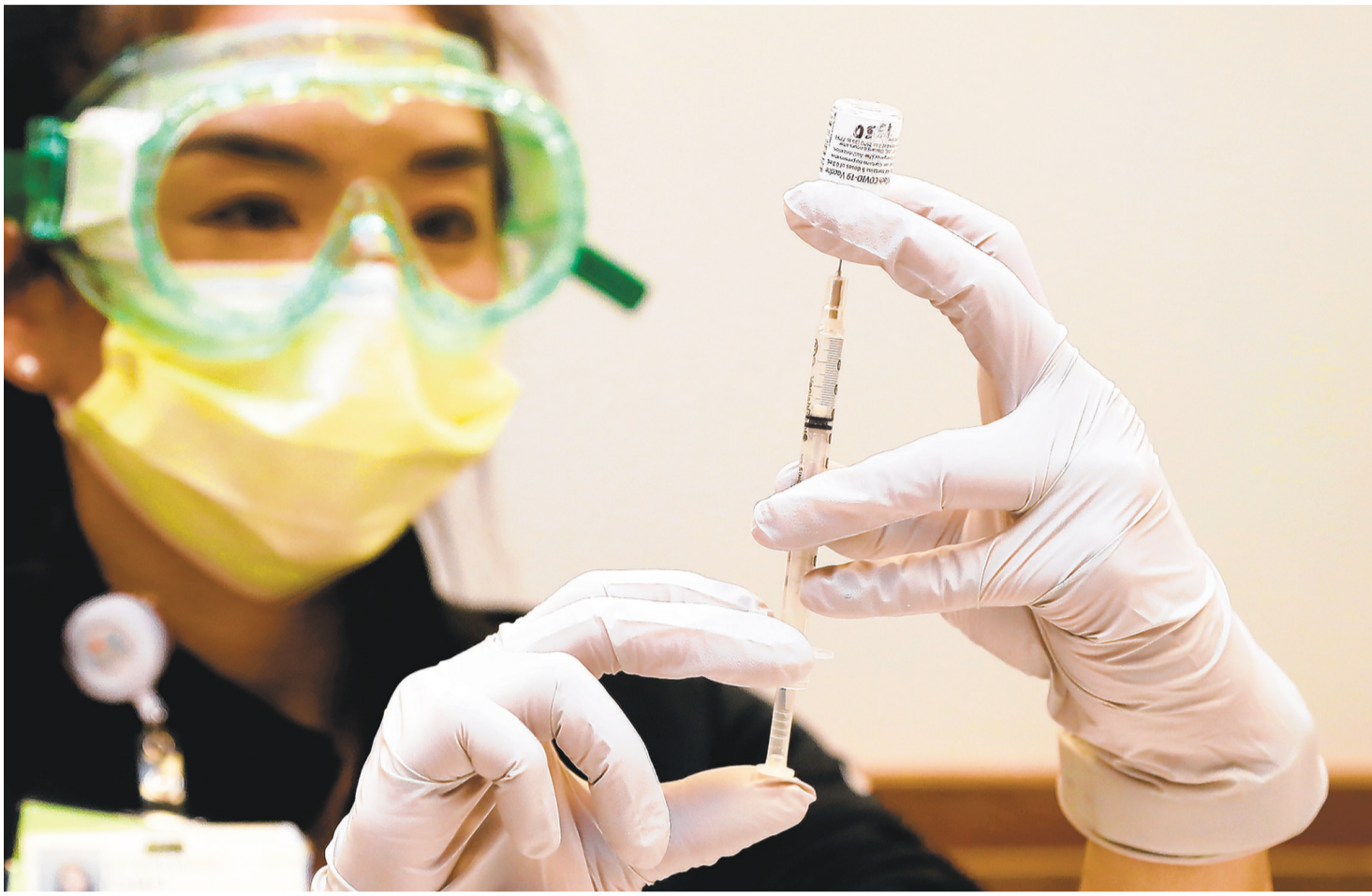


# Daily Pilot

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020 /// Now including Coastline Pilot and Huntington Beach Independent /// dailypilot.com



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

**CLINICAL PHARMACIST** Stephanie Chao fills a syringe with Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine at Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach.

## Vaccine arrives in O.C.: 'We can finally see an end to the storm'

As coronavirus cases continue to rise, local healthcare workers line up to get the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Hoag and Mission hospitals.

**BY LILLY NGUYEN**

For Dr. Robert Goldberg, the arrival of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is the ray of sunshine in a dark storm.

Goldberg, a pulmonologist and critical care physician at Mission Hospital in Mission Viejo, said that he and other healthcare workers have been waiting for so long. There'd been highs and lows during the

course of the pandemic. At its start this spring, there'd been worries that the hospital might be busy and overrun with patients.

Then, cases seemed to decrease — until they didn't.

The last few weeks have seen cases skyrocket in Orange County, which Goldberg said seemed to reach points higher than in March and April. But though it will be some time before the general public will be vaccinated, Goldberg thinks the arrival of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is a start to fighting back against the pandemic.

"We can finally see an end to the storm," Goldberg said.

Goldberg, along with dozens other healthcare workers across Orange County, received

the vaccine on Thursday after shipments arrived at area hospitals on Wednesday. Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian reported it received 1,950 doses to vaccinate its staff in Newport Beach and Irvine. Mission Hospital said it vaccinated more than 140 nurses and physicians at its campuses in Laguna Beach and Mission Viejo on Thursday. Dr. Michael Hurwitz, the chief of staff at Hoag, said that his staff and colleagues are "thrilled" to be vaccinated, and when they first put out the call to vaccinate for high-risk personnel — those seeing patients in the emergency room or intensive care units, for example — hospital workers couldn't sign up fast

See **Vaccine**, page A2

## O.C. hospitals told not to divert ambulances

**BY RUBEN VIVES, HAYLEY SMITH**

The Orange County Health Care Agency has issued an order that forbids hospital emergency rooms from redirecting ambulances to other medical facilities.

The order — the first of its kind in the region — went into effect at 7 p.m. Tuesday after 20 of the county's 25 emergency medical centers became so

overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients that they began diverting ambulances to other facilities in Orange County. As a result, ambulances were having difficulty finding a hospital that would take patients.

"This is not sustainable," Carl Schultz, emergency medical services director for the Orange County Health Agency, said in a written statement.

Schultz said ReddiNet, the

web-based emergency communications system that is used to report hospital, patient and emergency event status, would not accept "diversion status" from hospitals for a period of 72 hours. Hospital diversion is defined as a notification that patients who are arriving by ambulance will not be accepted by the receiving facility.

"If the situation remains at its present state, this suspension of

diversion will continue," Schultz said, acknowledging the stress it would put on hospitals. "I acknowledge these directives will be challenging to implement, but current circumstances dictate such action is required to support the EMS system."

The flood of COVID-19 patients has put unprecedented pressure on Orange County hos-

See **Hospitals**, page A3

## Return to distance learning imminent

NMUSD officials make the decision for secondary students, citing COVID concerns.

**BY SARA CARDINE**

Citing rising coronavirus infections and related absences among students, teachers and support staff — and the burden that's placing on the successful operation of the district — Newport-Mesa Unified officials have decided to pull secondary students back to distance learning in January.

Supt. Russell Lee Sung said in a special meeting Thursday the district faces a workforce crisis as more employees test positive for the virus or self-quarantine and as Newport-Mesa's health department staff become overwhelmed by contact tracing and reporting duties.

Anticipating a further surge following the upcoming winter break, officials recommended middle and high school students return to distance learning upon the Jan. 4 start of the new semester, continuing to Jan. 22.

"It's not just one thing — this is one of those decisions that is based on the totality of a lot of factors and considerations," Lee-Sung told board members. "We are very concerned about what will happen after the holidays."

Elementary schools, which have proved smaller and easier to manage, will continue to report to campus next semester under the same hybrid learning model.

Asst. Superintendent Sara Jocham, who oversees the district's health services department, provided a breakdown of virus cases recorded so far, explaining employees are spending hours and hours each day on the phone with the infected and the exposed.

From Oct. 27 through November, 71 students reported testing positive for coronavirus, while another 178 self-quarantined. So far in December, 128 positive cases have been reported with 72 students in quarantine, requiring nearly 600 follow-up calls from school nurses.

Meanwhile, 75 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19 since October, while another 129 have reported symptoms of the virus and 181 reportedly had close contact with an infected individual.

Some 141 students and staff coronavirus cases are currently being monitored, compared to 29 in early November. Jocham said

See **Secondary**, page A2

**SNOOPY WAVES**

to people lined up in cars waiting to view the Snoopy House exhibit during a drive-through holiday toy drive at IKEA in Costa Mesa on Wednesday.

Scott Smeltzer  
Staff Photographer



## Snoopy House finds temporary shelter in nonprofit toy drive at Costa Mesa IKEA

**BY SARA CARDINE**

Since 1966, Costa Mesa residents have celebrated the holidays by visiting Snoopy House — a Christmas-themed homage to Charles Schulz's comic strip "Peanuts" that stood for decades at a local residence before moving to the lawn outside City Hall in 2011.

Once there, the installation morphed into a civic event that featured free photos with Santa Claus, train rides and live performances and took on a life of its own as attendance expanded to around 15,000 visitors, accord-

ing to Dane Bora, a public affairs manager for the city of Costa Mesa.

"Since it came to City Hall, people have come up to us and said they haven't missed a year in 24 years, or even 40 years," Bora said. "There are a lot of diehard Snoopy House fans who want to keep that tradition alive."

With this year's coronavirus pandemic in full swing, however, the future of Snoopy House was looking uncertain — until fate, and maybe a touch of holiday magic, intervened.

City officials were racking their brains to figure out how they

might present a COVID-19-safe event that complied with restrictions against large gatherings at the same time local nonprofit Power of One Foundation was organizing a toy drive for area families in need.

The two groups were put in touch and a plan began to take shape.

Now, several of the Snoopy House characters and sets have been incorporated into a drive-through toy collection and giveaway event at the Costa Mesa IKEA that opened Wednesday

See **Snoopy**, page A4

## UC Irvine looks to pair with state for in-prison bachelor of arts program

**BY LILLY NGUYEN**

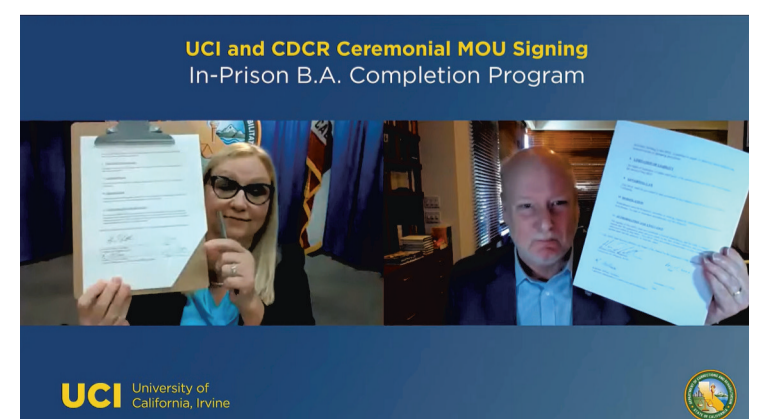
Inmates at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego will now have a chance to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology from UC Irvine.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and UCI signed a memorandum of understanding on the design

of what the university says is the first in-prison bachelor of arts program offered by the University of California system. The memorandum was signed on Wednesday.

The program, which is called Leveraging Inspiring Futures Through Educational Degrees or

See **UC Irvine**, page A4



Screenshot by Lilly Nguyen

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT** of Corrections and Rehabilitation Secretary Kathleen Allison and UC Irvine Chancellor Howard Gillman hold up signed memorandum of understandings for an in-prison bachelor of arts program in sociology.

# VACCINE

Continued from page A1

enough. "I think what I'm expressing is relief," said Hurwitz, who will also be receiving the vaccine. "I think everybody is feeling that. People here at the hospital are really exposed to a wide cross-section of the public all day long. I think they feel safer. They feel like they're being protected so they can do their important, critical work."

"Frankly, I'm very relieved that the vaccine is here and that we now have an opportunity in the first place to protect critical healthcare personnel to take care of the community and I'm looking forward for people to be vaccinated, protect themselves so that we can get back to life as it was before the pandemic," Hurwitz added.

California previously allocated about 327,000 doses and is expected to receive at least 1 million more by the end of the



Courtesy of Mission Hospital

**DR. ROBERT GOLDBERG**, a pulmonologist and critical care physician at Mission Hospital, left, receives his vaccine from Dr. James Keany, who works in the emergency room.

month between the additional 393,900 from Pfizer-BioNTech and 672,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine, if it receives U.S. authorization as expected.

"I think the vaccine, for those of us taking care of patients ... as a healthcare provider right in the thick of it, I'm so grateful and excited," said Dr. Nathan Gilmore, who works in the intensive care unit at Hoag and received the vaccine

Thursday. "It's a stressful time to be a doctor and a nurse and be in health care. Knowing you personally are at risk is one of the scariest parts. Having a vaccine now is such a relief."

"It gives me a lot more confidence. I'm still going to wear [personal protective equipment] and social distance and respect the

See **Vaccine**, page A3

# SECONDARY

Continued from page A1

health services employees and site administrators are working on nights and weekends to keep people informed about what steps to take.

"This was busy and hard when we had 29 (cases)," she said. "Now that we have 141, it's becoming almost paralyzing to the work we do."

Leona Olson, assistant superintendent of human resources, reported similar challenges. She explained support staff — including instructional aides, food service workers and custodians — have been especially impacted by the virus, followed by teachers. And locating substitute teachers has been daunting.

"We are finding now substitutes are turning down jobs, not feeling comfortable going into the classrooms," Olson said.

Board members received 278 public comments on the recommendation. Among them was elementary school employee Katie Riccio, who suggested Newport-Mesa return all schools to a distance learning model, not just secondary schools.

"This is a safety issue for the entire district, not just secondary schools," Riccio said. "The COVID rates in Orange County are soaring and staying open, even in the hybrid model, puts students and staff alike at a higher risk for contracting the virus."

Parent Rachel Duffy, however, said she was more afraid of the risks associated with continued distance learning than of the coronavirus.

"Please keep our children in school. Their mental well-being is at stake," she urged board members. "I'm not concerned about my child getting COVID but, rather, feeling suicidal."

Trustee Krista Weigand asked why officials seemed to go back on their word after saying closures would not occur until rates were above 5% at a single school or grade level. Lee-Sung explained while the 5% trigger is a state guideline, there was no way the district could sustain that kind of a hit.

"The thought of us waiting until that 5% to close is absolutely frightening to me," he said. "Right now, we're looking at .5% to 1% ... and look at what it has done to our organization. This recommendation is the right thing to do under the totality of circumstances."

Board members voted 6-1 to return secondary schools to distance learning for the start of the spring semester through Jan. 22, with Weigand casting the lone dissenting vote.

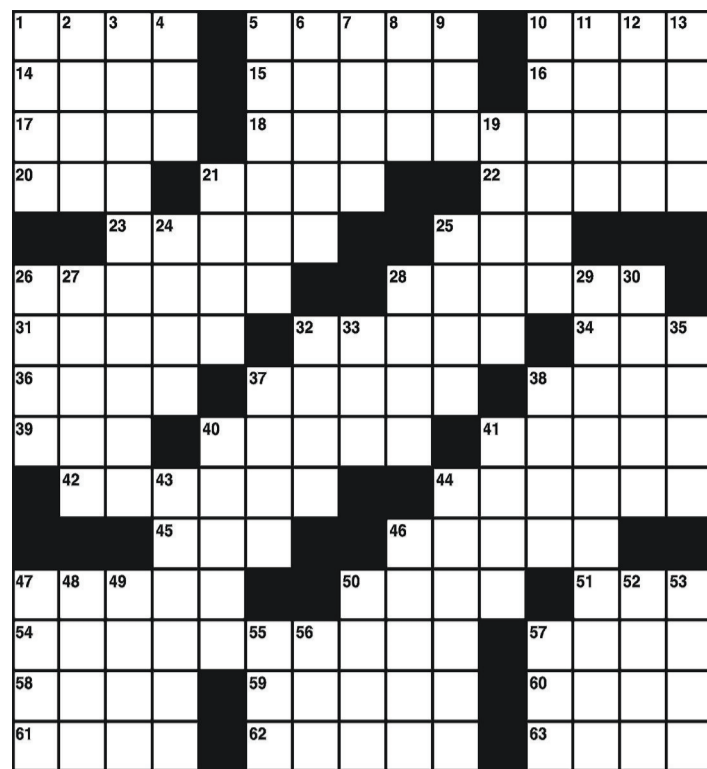
sara.cardine@latimes.com  
Twitter: @SaraCardine

# THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

**ACROSS**  
 1 Raincoats for Brits  
 5 Not as vivid in color  
 10 Sound rebound  
 14 Run \_; go wild  
 15 Dickinson or Brontë  
 16 Exhibition  
 17 Kooky  
 18 Police interrogator's goal  
 20 Jr. naval rank  
 21 Breathe heavily  
 22 Prepares for a trip  
 23 Cinnamon roll topper  
 25 Give it a go  
 26 Shingles symptoms  
 28 Chuck \_; cuts of beef  
 31 Sanctuary table  
 32 Haggard  
 34 "Please Don't — the Daisies"  
 36 \_ up; busy  
 37 Baseball's Koufax  
 38 Office note  
 39 Word with Juan or Francisco  
 40 Playground item  
 41 One not yet of age  
 42 NY's \_ Island  
 44 Indian fig tree  
 45 Noticed  
 46 Tendon  
 47 Domineering  
 50 Pack animal  
 51 Actress \_ Marie Saint  
 54 Standoffish  
 57 Virginia \_; lively dance  
 58 Many hardware stores  
 59 Sculpt  
 60 Billfold items  
 61 End of summertime: abbr.  
 62 Cornered  
 63 Misprint

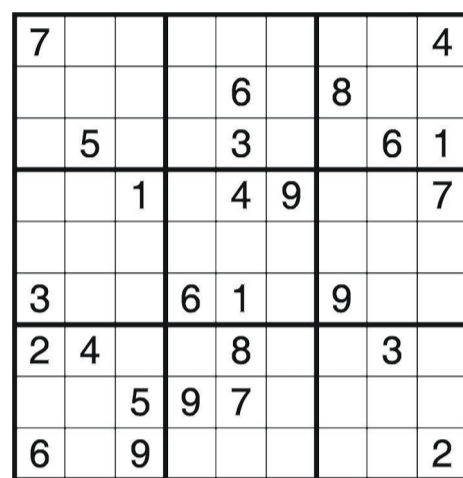
**DOWN**  
 1 Labyrinth



# SUDOKU

By The Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit [sudoku.org.uk](http://sudoku.org.uk).



For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A3.

2 To \_; unanimously  
 3 Unchanging  
 4 Wild blue yonder  
 5 Nut varieties  
 6 In the midst of  
 7 Fuzzy residue  
 8 Leprechaun's

cousin  
 9 Bakery loaf  
 10 Prose writings  
 11 Fashionable  
 12 "Peter Pan" pirate  
 13 Possesses  
 19 Nursery rhyme  
 Jack

21 Landing place  
 24 Actor Everett  
 25 Broadway award  
 26 Word of disgust  
 27 Acquired name  
 28 Impolite  
 29 Very small  
 30 Polynesian island group  
 32 Make progress  
 33 "Four score \_ seven years ago"  
 35 Having mixed feelings  
 37 Murdered  
 38 Excavation site  
 40 Remains  
 41 Horse's hair  
 43 Help  
 44 Sent an invoice to  
 46 Shampoo brand  
 47 Pasture cries  
 48 \_ more; again  
 49 \_ on; trample  
 50 Deep gooey mud  
 52 Gore or Pence  
 53 Additionally  
 55 31-day period: abbr.  
 56 Train unit  
 57 Deteriorate

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# VACCINE

Continued from page A2

recommendations knowing the vaccine isn't perfect," he added. "But it is a relief to me and my family."

Gilmore said he feels right now is the biggest challenge for healthcare workers.

"The volumes of patients are higher than they ever have been," Gilmore said. "We're right at the edge of getting this vaccine, but we're still medically challenged as we try to give every patient the best possible chance of survival — including all the other patients sick with other conditions ... and keep up with all that demand."

The Orange County Health Care Agency reported Thursday that COVID-19 cases grew by another 2,615 and included 13 new deaths. Hospitalizations are up to 1,519 and 343 cases are now in intensive care units. Data reveals just 7.1% of adult beds are available. Across Southern California, which the state

defines as Imperial, Inyo, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, the availability of intensive care unit beds has dropped to 0%.

"There are more people dying now than before and that's going to get worse if we don't continue to protect ourselves and our loved ones," Gilmore said. "There's no question that Thanksgiving gatherings happened. I've had patients that have died that caught COVID during Thanksgiving, that've died with all the medical treatments possible and they still didn't make it."

Gilmore said he wanted to warn citizens to abstain from attending Christmas parties or New Year's celebrations this year, adding that hospitals would be able to adapt but that there were going to be some patients who wouldn't make it no matter what physicians did. "That can be prevented," Gilmore said. Hurwitz said that he wanted Orange County



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

**EMERGENCY ROOM** doctor Paula Gonella receives her first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine administered by pharmacist Gene Nguyen at Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach on Thursday.

residents to take the opportunity to be vaccinated when it was made available.

"I know they're worried about their personal safety and — from everything I've read and everything I've seen — the vaccine is safe," Hurwitz said. "I think the fact that healthcare workers are stepping forward is a

testament to that. The sooner we get everybody vaccinated, the sooner we get businesses back online and we get kids safely in school and we can return to a sense of normalcy."

Here are the latest cumulative coronavirus case counts and COVID-19 deaths for select cities in

Orange County:

- Santa Ana: 22,570 cases; 349 deaths
- Anaheim: 19,262 cases; 371 deaths
- Huntington Beach: 4,622 cases; 94 deaths
- Costa Mesa: 3,730 cases; 49 deaths
- Irvine: 4,149 cases; 19 deaths

- Newport Beach: 1,803 cases; 28 deaths
  - Fountain Valley: 1,413 cases; 24 deaths
  - Laguna Beach: 409 cases; fewer than five deaths
- Here are the case counts by age group, followed by deaths:
- 0 to 17: 10,320 cases; one death
  - 18 to 24: 16,366 cases; four deaths
  - 25 to 34: 23,908 cases; 24 deaths
  - 35 to 44: 17,991 cases; 42 deaths
  - 45 to 54: 18,336 cases; 127 deaths
  - 55 to 64: 13,796 cases; 238 deaths
  - 65 to 74: 6,985 cases; 336 deaths
  - 75 to 84: 3,538 cases; 380 deaths
  - 85 and older: 2,479 cases; 579 deaths

Updated figures are posted daily at [occovid19.oehealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc](http://occovid19.oehealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc). For information on getting tested, visit [occovid19.oehealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing](http://occovid19.oehealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing).

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## HOSPITALS

Continued from page A1

pitals amid rising concerns about the potential collapse of the region's emergency medical system. In an effort to help, the county said it would deploy mobile field hospitals, which help expand hospital capacity by adding additional beds to existing grounds.

In a news release, Orange County health director Dr. Clayton Chau said the deployment of the field hospitals "sounds alarming because it is alarming."

"I implore our residents not to gather with other households and limit upcoming holiday celebrations to those you live with," he said.

The field hospitals are housed in large, semi-type trailers that contain heavy-duty canvas tents with hard flooring, temperature-control, running water, toilets

and showers, generators, lighting and air purifiers, the agency said. Three hospitals — Fountain Valley Regional, St. Jude Medical Center and UC Irvine — have requested the units, which will add between 25 and 50 beds to their existing capacities, officials said.

One medical professional at St. Jude told Orange County Supervisor Doug Chaffee that the hospital was reaching its limit.

"They're using every available bed," Chaffee told City News Service. "The emergency department has an overflow. ... All the Orange County hospitals are in the same situation."

The state has opened temporary field hospitals in Costa Mesa, Porterville, Sacramento and Imperial, with other facilities on standby in Riverside, Richmond, Fresno, San Diego and San Francisco.

According to the latest state data, there were 1,486

coronavirus-positive patients hospitalized in Orange County as of Wednesday — an all-time high that's more than double the total from two weeks ago.

The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care had risen to 319 county-wide on Wednesday. A month ago, there were 85.

The county is also dealing with an uptick in outbreaks at skilled nursing homes, assisted living facilities and county jails.

As of Wednesday, 32 skilled nursing facilities and 36 assisted living facilities had at least two confirmed cases of coronavirus infection. An outbreak in the county's jails that started last week has now infected 627 inmates, up from 416 reported Monday. The county is awaiting results of 86 more tests.

Dr. Paul Sheikewitz of Providence St. Joseph's Hospital in Orange, who was among the first to receive

the Pfizer vaccine Wednesday, said the hospital was nearing its limit.

"The greatest challenge is the burden of the number of patients we see versus the number of staff able to take care of patients," he told City News Service.

The hospital's chief executive, Dr. Jeremy Zoch, said the latest surge "has been pretty incredible."

"Last summer, when we had our surge over July, we had the National Guard in here helping us. ... But, frankly, this surge we have 75% more patients than the last surge," he said. "It has challenged us."

*Ruben Vives and Hayley Smith are staff reporters with the Los Angeles Times. City News Service and Times staff writers Rong-Gong Lin II and Luke Money contributed to this report.*

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