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Coronavirus

Covid-19 outbreak at Auburn nursing home infects 137 residents, kills 24

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The Commons on St. Anthony nursing home in Auburn

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By **James T. Mulder | jmulder@syracuse.com**

Auburn, N.Y. – A Covid-19 outbreak at a Cayuga County nursing home that began two weeks ago has infected 137 residents, 24 of whom have died.

The outbreak at The Commons on St. Anthony in Auburn started Dec. 21 as a wave of post-Thanksgiving Covid-19 cases began hitting the county, said Julie Sheedy, an official of Loretto which operates the 300-bed nursing home.

Forty-seven employees have tested positive.

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Since the outbreak began, 21 residents have died at The Commons and three in the hospital, Sheedy said. Eleven residents have died since Wednesday, she said.

There had been no nursing home Covid-19 deaths in Cayuga County until the first three deaths at the Commons were reported Dec. 29. The three other nursing homes in Cayuga have not reported any Covid-19 deaths.

“Our team is always deeply affected by any loss of life, and our hearts are with the families of these individuals,” Sheedy said.

The total Covid-19 death toll in the county has increased from 13 on Dec. 21 to 44 as of Thursday. The nursing home deaths account for 54% of the county’s Covid-19 fatalities.

There have been 3,650 confirmed Covid-19 cases in Cayuga since the pandemic began. Nearly half of those cases have been reported since Dec. 21.

The average percentage of people testing positive for Covid-19 in Cayuga County is 12%, the highest rate in Central New York. Here are the average positive test rates for other counties in the region: Onondaga, 7.8%; Oswego, 9.7%; Madison, 8.5%; and Cortland, 8%.

During the outbreak Commons employees are wearing gowns, gloves and face shields at all times when working with residents, Sheedy said. The nursing home also is isolating residents who test positive on Covid-19 floors.

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Sheedy said the nursing home is testing residents on a schedule established by the state Health Department. The facility also is testing employees weekly. Sheedy said the state Health Department inspected the nursing home's infection control practices Wednesday and found no deficiencies.

The Commons gets a one-star rating, the lowest, from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. The one-star rating means the nursing home is considered much below average based on health inspections, staffing and quality of care.

The nursing home began vaccinating residents Dec. 22. So far 193 residents, or 80%, and 113 employees, or less than half the staff, have been vaccinated. The nursing home plans to do more vaccinations Jan. 12.

Kaylee Gabak, a certified nursing assistant at The Commons, is on life support at Upstate University Hospital after becoming infected with Covid-19. Her family believes Gabak was infected at The Commons before she went on maternity

leave Dec. 16. Gabak gave birth to a baby girl Dec. 26, went home, then had to be hospitalized after developing breathing problems.

If you live or work at The Commons on St. Anthony we'd like to hear from you. We want to learn from your experience and tell your story. Contact James T. Mulder at jmulder@syracuse.com or (315) 470-2245.

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