

Virginia hospitals respond to gradual reopening with a warning

By **Jenna Portnoy**
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The phased reopening will do nothing to change policies and procedures in place at Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, chief medical officer Jeff DiLisi said Friday afternoon. He said around the country even a gradual relaxing of stay-at-home orders has resulted in a surge of cases.

“What we’re going to be watching is maybe two to three weeks from now what happens to our admissions in the hospital and who we see coming into the ER,” he said.

People should not use their newfound freedom to dine outdoors at a restaurant or to get a haircut as permission to take risks, DiLisi said.

“The policies that are laid out for Phase 1, if people take them seriously, wearing masks and practicing social distancing, hopefully we can go to Phase 2,” he said. Otherwise, “we could certainly see a bump up.”

Virginia Hospital Center treated as many as 100 coronavirus patients at once at the peak of infection in late April to early May, he said.

Paul Skolnik, an infectious-disease physician and chair of medicine for Carilion Clinic, which operates Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, said like many parts of the country that have reported relatively few cases, there’s significant resistance to preventive measures among some in Southwest Virginia.

“There are many license plates in Southwest Virginia that have the logo, ‘Don’t Tread on Me,’” he said. “That’s not a particularly helpful viewpoint when we’re talking about use of masks and social distancing.”

Some residents have incorrectly translated the governor’s reopening guidelines to mean that hand hygiene and other measures are less important, Skolnik said.

“In fact, they’re even more important than they were before so we can control any risk of a second wave or a surge especially in Southwest Virginia where we’ve been able to manage things so we haven’t had as many cases,” he said.

The Roanoke hospital was treating nine coronavirus-positive patients on Friday, he said.