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READER SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Ontario Center resident Marilyn Baines rings in the New Year as Hank Ranney and his band performs the hits of Johnny Cash, Patsy Cline, Waylon Jennings, George Jones, Conway Twitty and Hank Williams. PHOTOS PROVIDED



Ontario Center resident Shirley Miller celebrates the New Year with hors d'oeuvres and country classics performed by Hank Ranney and his band.



Ontario Center residents, including JoAnn Robenolt, enjoy hors d'oeuvres and sparkling apple cider on New Year's Eve.

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Tracing

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"We're still looking at a situation that we're addressing very seriously," Hochul said, adding the strains are heightened for hospitals serving communities with comparatively lower COVID-19 vaccination rates.

Statewide, COVID-19 hospitalizations have continued to climb recently, reaching 12,540 on Monday. But hospitalizations lag behind cases by several weeks, state officials said, adding new data suggests up to 42% of the hospitalizations involved patients admitted to hospitals for non-COVID health conditions. Health officials would consider resuming elective care at the hospitals in those upstate regions in two weeks. There is also a list of 40 hospitals statewide that have suspended elective care as they are operating at below 10% staffed bed capacity.

Why NY is ending COVID contact tracing

The move to end COVID-19 contact tracing in New York, in part, conceded the massive scope of omicron variant cases — which are proving less severe than prior strains such as the delta variant — rendered contact-tracing investigations ineffective.

Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett said the omicron variant also has a very short incubation period and many more people are being tested.

"So the result is a very large number of people who tested positive and a very short window to disrupt the chain of transmission," she said, adding public health workers currently involved in contact tracing would be redirected to focus on COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts.

Some counties, including Rockland and Putnam in the Hudson Valley, had previously asked people to alert others about possible exposure and set up a system that lets people generate their own isolation letters for work, school, or public aid. County leaders had said staff were too overwhelmed by soaring COVID cases to keep up.

Hochul on Tuesday noted county officials would still be allowed to continue local contact tracing efforts, if they chose, despite the state plan moving its efforts online. It wasn't immediately clear Tuesday if New Yorkers would be able to call a telephone hotline run by the state to obtain isolation documents.

Nancy Cutler of The Journal News/lohud contributed to this report.

David Robinson is the state health care reporter for the USA TODAY Network New York. He can be reached at drobinson@gannett.com and followed on Twitter: @DrobinsonLoIud



Mackenzie Garcia analyses and transmits the results of the COVID-19 tests given Jan. 4 at Patriot Hills Golf Course in Stony Point. JOHN MEORE/THE JOURNAL NEWS