

COVID-19 case rates in Arkansas are still increasing rapidly, with an emphasis in Sevier County, according to the latest predictive models by The University of Arkansas for Medical Services.

Every two weeks, the UAMS Fay W. Bozeman College of Public Health shares data from its COVID-19 models that provide short-term forecasts and long-term projections with Gov. Asa Hutchinson, the state's Department of Health and others.

The latest report confirmed the trend of Sevier County having some of the highest rates of per-capita COVID-19 cases in the state, with Montgomery on the opposite end of the spectrum, yielding the lowest rate in Arkansas.

From the set of data available from the Arkansas Department of Health from July 13 through July 15, UAMS found that Sevier held the highest rate of community cases per population of 10,000, at 473.1, while Montgomery's rate was a mere 5.3.

Last month, Sevier County had concerns about residents' reluctance to wear masks, according to County Health Officer Dr. Jason Lofton, as reported in the Gazette's June 2 story. This, combined with the high population of employees at large industries like Sevier County's Tyson Foods and Pilgrim's Pride processing plants, was speculated by Lofton to have contributed to yielding a higher rate of cases.

He also added they are doing a good job with employee safety protocols.

Miller County's community rate of cases per 10,000 population was 61.0, while Lafayette was at 39.2, Hempstead's was 37.2, and Little River fell in at 33.4.

It is important to add that cases used to calculate these rates excluded those originating in nursing homes and prisons.

The projections show there is a peak in sight for when cases may start to plateau in Arkansas.

According to projections based on the extended state-space SIR (eSIR) model, for active infections from July 2020 to March 2021, the numbers are expected to top out in November 2020 at more than 100,000 active cases.

Mark Williams, dean of UAMS Faye Boozman College of Public Health, went into more detail on what to take from the information provided.