



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ITASCA COVID-19 CASES STABILIZE WITH WIDESPREAD PRECAUTIONS IN PLACE

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **June 18, 2020**) – Itasca County has seen no additional laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 and no additional related deaths since Monday, according to Itasca County Public Health Department Manager Kelly Chandler. “We see new cases are coming in at a slower pace, similar to the state of Minnesota,” she said.

The age range of Itasca County positive COVID-19 cases to date is 6 to 94, with 24 male and 35 female. The largest number of laboratory-confirmed cases are in the 60-69 and 80-89 age ranges. The 20-29 age range is the next largest group of confirmed cases.

Of Itasca area cases requiring advanced care, 12 were hospitalized and five were in an ICU. As previously reported, 12 area residents, ranging in age from 57 to 94, have passed away from COVID-related causes, although not all were hospitalized.

“As a community, we have come together to keep our residents safe and to address the impacts of COVID-19 – whether they be economic or social impacts,” said Chandler. “While we cannot pull back on our efforts, I do think we can and should pause to appreciate the ongoing efforts of so many in keeping each other safe.”

As Itasca County settles into the Phase 3 Recovery stage of the Stay Safe Minnesota plan, Itasca County Public Health has received a number of questions related to COVID-19, such as the following:

Is COVID-19 just like another version of influenza?

“No,” said Chandler. “For some basic reasons: it’s deadlier, we do not yet have vaccinations available, it is more easily spread, and humans are not naturally immune.”

Johns Hopkins University issued the following explanation on June 17:



“Influenza (the flu) and COVID-19, the illness caused by the [coronavirus](#) that’s led to the current pandemic, are both infectious respiratory illnesses. Although the symptoms of COVID-19 and the flu can look similar, the two illnesses are caused by different viruses.

“While both the flu and COVID-19 may be transmitted in similar ways, there is also a possible difference: COVID-19 might be spread through the airborne route, meaning that tiny droplets remaining in the air could cause disease in others even after the ill person is no longer near.

“The COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly. Since this disease is caused by a new virus, people do not have immunity to it, and a vaccine may be many months away. Doctors and scientists are working to estimate the mortality rate of COVID-19, but at present, it is thought to be substantially higher than that of most strains of the flu.”

Where can I be tested in Itasca County and how long does it take to get results?

Bigfork Valley

Bigfork Valley continues to follow the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidelines for testing, which now includes all symptomatic patients as well as individuals that participate in social protests and related events. Bigfork Valley Hospital, in collaboration with Scenic Rivers Health Services (SRHS), offers curbside testing by appointment in Bigfork from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Bigfork Valley utilizes multiple different types of COVID-19 testing depending on the circumstances of the patient being screened and the supplies available. We currently utilize the Abbott ID-Now for rapid in-house testing on all surgical patients, hospitalized patients, and emergency room transfers. Results for this method of testing have a minimum turnaround time of 15 minutes. We also utilize third-party testing with Minnesota Department of Health and LabCorp. Results when utilizing these methods are received by the ordering provider within two to three days of testing. LabCorp is also utilized for antibodies testing and results are received within two to four days.

According to Angela Kleffman, Bigfork Valley chief operating officer, “Our ultimate goal is to ensure every patient receives the appropriate care in the right location. Patients with questions about whether they should be tested for COVID-19 should contact their primary care provider.

“Bigfork Valley will continue to monitor recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to maintain the safety of our patients, staff, and community. We appreciate the continued support during this time.”

Essentia Health Deer River

SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing COVID-19) testing is performed at all Essentia Health hospitals, including Essentia Health Deer River. Essentia Health continues to follow Minnesota Department of Health guidelines for testing, and our approach is dependent on patient



circumstances and testing supply availability. Currently Essentia Health offers rapid testing through the Cepheid and Luminex Aries platforms for patients who are hospitalized with symptoms, patients hospitalized with no symptoms who came from a congregate living situation, patients needing emergency surgery, and for emergency department transfers. Cepheid testing takes one hour while Luminex Aries testing takes two hours.

Due to high demand, Essentia has also partnered with Mayo Clinic Laboratories for additional testing, which can take up to three days to receive results. Serology testing for antibodies is also available and is also sent through the Mayo Clinic Laboratories, with a turnaround time of 2-4 days depending on volumes. Essentia Health Deer River offers daily curbside testing by appointment from 10:00 a.m. to noon.

To assure efficient and timely care, Essentia Health encourages patients to contact their primary care provider for guidance on testing and screening options.

“Our patients’ health and safety and the safety of our caregivers and staff is our top priority,” said Amanda Reed, RN, ambulatory care supervisor for Essentia Health Deer River. “We have improved our existing safety measures and implemented new ones to make sure our clinics and hospitals are as safe as possible.”

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital

Grand Itasca continues to offer testing to all patients with symptoms of COVID-19, per Minnesota Department of Health guidance. Symptomatic patients may call the appointment line at 218-326-7344 to request a telephone visit with a provider who will ensure they meet criteria for testing. Patients will then be instructed to present for curbside testing, which is available 7 days a week from 8:00am-5:00pm.

Antibody testing is also available at Grand Itasca and patients should follow the same process of scheduling a telephone visit with a provider should they wish to have the antibody test done. The provider will put in an order and provide instructions to the patient to come to Grand Itasca for a lab draw.

Most COVID-19 tests and all antibody tests are sent to the lab at M Health Fairview in the Twin Cities for processing. Results for both are back within 72 hours, but more commonly within 24-48 hours.

Grand Itasca is also able to run quick tests using in-house Cepheid technology. These tests are generally resulted in less than 90 minutes. At this time, supplies for this type of testing is very limited so only very few tests are run through this process.

"We are conducting about 35 tests a day via our curbside process and have the capacity to do more, if needed," says Jon Pederson, Senior Director of Support Services. "We continue to prepare our facilities and staff for a surge of patients needing testing and patient care."



Why does the Minnesota data on Long Term Care look worse compared to other states?

According to Minnesota Department of Health,

- Minnesota is defining long-term care (LTC) more broadly than in other states, including any facility where the residents receive medical care from the facility. This includes nursing homes, assisted living, memory care, TCUs, hospice facilities, group homes, mental health facilities, and substance abuse treatment facilities.
- In addition to differences on how LTC is defined, the Minnesota Department of Health situation update on the website provides case and death counts, not rates, making it difficult to compare “apples to apples” with other states.
- For example, the COVID-19 case rate in Minnesota nursing homes is 39.9 per 1000 nursing home residents. The national average is at a rate of 62 per 1000 nursing home residents.
- The COVID death rate in Minnesota nursing homes is 12.7 per 1000 nursing home residents. The national average is at a rate of 27.5 per 1000 nursing home residents.

Itasca County’s Message Center is available for those with COVID-related issues and needs at 218-327-6784. Response calls will be made between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Helpful resources:

Nursing Home COVID-19 Data: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/6120-nursing-home-covid-19-data.pdf> Please note: 100% of MN nursing homes were surveyed. CMS reported this data before all of the MN surveys were completed/reported to CMS. The data included here is only for nursing homes, not other types of LTC facilities.

Coronavirus vs Flu: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-disease-2019-vs-the-flu>

Note to media: Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Fridays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. There will be no briefing on July 3. Recordings available. Contact anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us for more information.

Media Contacts

Please contact each organization individually or Itasca County staff: Kelly Chandler (218-327-6144 and Kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us) or Anna Anttila (anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us).