



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TITLE

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Jan. 7, 2021**) – Itasca County continues to see steady declines in new COVID cases. Over the past week, 53 new cases were identified and 117 in the past 14 days. The 14-day average case rate per 10,000 residents also is lower, with a rate of 23 as of Jan. 4, down from a high of 129 in mid-November.

At the same time, 43 Itasca area residents have lost their lives to COVID and 85 remain hospitalized (16 in intensive care).

“Our sincere sympathies to the families of those who have passed from this virus and to those who are hospitalized, in the ICU, or who have not returned to their previous state of health after having a COVID-19 infection,” said Kelly Chandler, division manager for Itasca County Public Health.

As infection rates continue to improve, area schools are moving toward more in-person learning throughout January. With this, schools are preparing to administer COVID testing every two weeks for staff.

Recent revisions to the state’s Stay Safe Plan allow other expansions, such as indoor seating in restaurants and athletic competitions—with a variety of conditions.

Vaccines also continue to roll out in Itasca County in phases and tiers. The initial phase includes hospital workers, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) workers, including ambulances, fire departments and law enforcement who respond to 911 calls and provide medical care. Residents and staff of skilled nursing and assisted living facilities began vaccinations this week and will be followed by other providers of outpatient health care.

Three different types of organizations are receiving and delivering vaccines in Itasca County. Hospitals are administering vaccines to their staff and ambulance staff. Pharmacies are responsible for some skilled nursing facilities and assisted living residents and staff. Itasca County Public Health has been responsible for EMS workers that are in law enforcement, fire departments and community vaccinators.

“We are very appreciative of the patience of our Itasca communities as we move through the vaccine rollout,” said Chandler. “We are excited to administer the vaccines and to move



forward through this COVID pandemic. We are beginning to see the finish line, even though it's still a way out."

The first phases of vaccinations are administered based on where one works (e.g., health care) or resides (e.g., nursing facilities). In these cases, those in line to be vaccinated are being notified by their employers or their facilities as it is their turn. For persons with chronic healthcare conditions or who are in the older age demographic, they will be notified by their healthcare provider when it is their turn.

"This would be a great time, if one doesn't already have a primary care provider, to establish with care with someone," said Chandler. "And for those who have the available technology, enroll in the electronic healthcare system for your provider, such as myHealth for Essentia or myChart for Grand Itasca. The more ways your healthcare providers can contact you, the better."

Itasca County Public Health will issue situation updates, including vaccinations status, twice weekly. Healthcare partners also will issue updates through their communications channels.

At this time, public health departments throughout the state are guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Minnesota Department of Health. Health care providers are guided by their regional and state entities.

"At this time, we are unable to stray from our priority groups," said Chandler. "As vaccines become more available, we will move quickly through our phases.

"Thank you again to our Itasca County neighbors. You have done a great job keeping numbers down over the holidays."

Until communities are able to return to a more normal state, mental and emotional health continue to be under stress, said three local professionals.

"It's easy to fall into traps of distress when we don't nourish our inner beings," said Tanis Henderson, school counselor for Deer River Schools and president of the Minnesota School Counselor Association. "Especially now, lines between home and school and work can be blurred and intentional boundaries may be needed.

"There are many ways to take care of oneself; there's not a single recipe. Think about small acts, what's already working for you. Like taking breaths, getting outside. It also might mean taking something away. Any act of self-care is an act of love, and I encourage every person to find space in daily life to take care."

Specific to youth, Henderson also said, "Sleep is important for learning; electronic device use such as cell phones, tablets and computers can impact sleep. With students being connected for both academic and social purposes, it is important that they have breaks. Families should set



boundaries for device use and can use things like family media agreements to talk about and determine what makes sense for their family.

“If your child is struggling with mental health and wellness School Counselors are available to provide support in school as well as provide referral to community and school based mental health resources if needed. There are many telehealth (virtual) options for families who are not able to meet in person with a provider.”

Resources recommended by Henderson for students and their mental health support:

1. Family Doctor/Medical Provider
2. Crisis Response Team - 218-326-8565 or 800-442-8565 (211 from a landline)
3. Crisis Text Line - Text MN to 741741 to access a Crisis Counselor via text messaging. (more information in attached document)

“Every person is struggling in some way right now, no matter age or situation,” said mental health therapist Jessie Colter. “We usually know what to do take care of ourselves, but we don’t always follow through. Now, more than ever, we need to be intentional. For some people, its committing to take a shower three days a week. For others, it’s exercise of nutrition. Whatever works, it’s about intentionality and consistency.

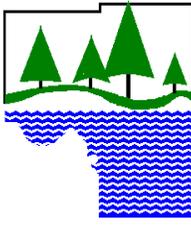
“We’re in a place where none of us have ever been. As humans, we crave structure and predictability and so much in the world is not that. You may be forgetting things, struggling to tackle tasks that used to be easy or took a lot less time. Stress is a direct result of what we are going through right now; it’s real.”

“Sometimes, we can be doing a good job of taking care of ourselves and still have an ambiguous feeling of discomfort,” said Cre Larson, executive director for First Call for Help/211. “It’s worth asking, ‘Could this be fear?’ Right now, there’s a lot of fear fueled by scarcity, especially going hungry. Or a sense of loss of safety given political chaos, job loss, shut-downs. It helps to take a minute to identify that ambiguous discomfort, recognize that you may have been readjusting and becoming more tolerant, but it’s taking a toll.

“Self-care also can mean asking, ‘Why am I feeling comfortable when I logically shouldn’t?’ Slow down and identify the presence of stress and discomfort, versus just plowing through whatever you need to achieve in a day. Then, tapping into what you know works for you. Often, it’s connecting. Isolation and social distancing may be necessary, but it doesn’t have to mean cutting off interaction; it’s just about changing its forms.”

Itasca residents with questions or concerns may leave them at the Itasca County COVID message line, with calls returned 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. The Itasca COVID line number is 218-327-6784. Current local data and information also can be found at the county’s website here: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

Helpful resources:



Itasca area mental health resources: www.stableembrace.com

Family media agreement: <https://www.common sense media.org/family-media-agreement> and <https://www.common sense media.org/>

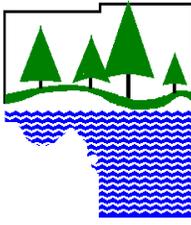
Vaccine Q&A with Bigfork Valley's Dr. Eric Scrivner: <https://www.bigforkvalley.org/covid-19-vaccine>

Vaccine Q&A with Grand Itasca's Dr. Dan Soular on ICTV: <https://youtu.be/uD8kZIS2AZ8>

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PHOTO CAPTION (above): Pamela Stangland, RN, RD, LD, CDCES at Bigfork Valley recently received the COVID vaccine, “because it saves lives and it protects others,” she said. “My father is on Hospice, my father-in-law is 95 years old, my brother is going through chemo and I took care of my daughter and son-in-law while they battled COVID. If I can help to stop this pandemic, I will willingly do my part.”



Media briefing: Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. The next scheduled briefing will be Jan. 21.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

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