



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER
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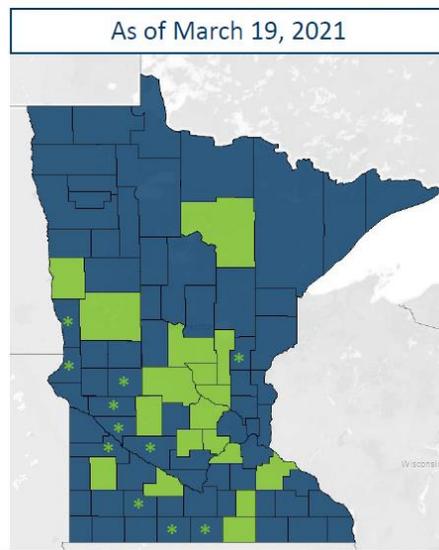
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VARIANTS CONTRIBUTING TO RISING COVID CASES IN ITASCA COUNTY

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **March 26, 2021**) – Minnesota Department of Health has confirmed the presence of the COVID-19 variant B.1.1.7 in Itasca County, likely a contributor to a sustained rise in new positive cases among residents. Originally identified in the United Kingdom, this variant spreads more easily and quickly than other variants according to Centers for Disease Control. Itasca is one of 10 counties in Minnesota known to have a B.1.1.7 variant case.

MDH also has informed Itasca County Public Health that another variant, not yet identified, likely was circulating in Grand Rapids in January and February. Additional information is pending from state officials.

Positive cases of COVID-19 among Itasca County residents began rising again in late February. Over the past seven days, 84 new cases have been diagnosed here and 89 the week before that. As measured by a 14-day rate per 10,000 residents, Itasca County has gone from 14 to 33.7 – significantly higher than most Northern Minnesota counties.



Itasca County is one of 10 Minnesota counties known to have cases caused by the B.1.1.7 virus variant.

Source: Minnesota Department of Health.



“The good news is that more and more vaccine is available here in our community, and all of the current vaccines are effective against variants,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division director. “With the governor opening up vaccine to all ages 16 and older, get vaccinated wherever and whenever you can.”

Vaccines are available throughout Itasca County, including:

Bigfork Valley: Bigfork Valley is prepared to expand its vaccine clinic to all Minnesotans age 16 and older as vaccinations become available. The facility has developed a list of patients interested in receiving the COVID-19 Vaccine who will be contacted for appointments as they become available. To be added to the contact list call 218-743-4444, Option 4, or email COVIDWaitList@BigforkValley.org. You need not be a current patient at Bigfork Valley to be added to the list. For the latest vaccine information at Bigfork Valley, visit <https://www.bigforkvalley.org/covid-19-vaccine/>.

Essentia Health Deer River: Vaccinations are available in Deer River and throughout the Essentia system. To make an appointment, visit <https://www.essentiahealth.org/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine-information/> or call 218-786-1750.

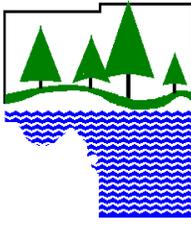
Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital: Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital reached an important landmark this week by administering its 5,000th COVID-19 vaccine. This number symbolizes tireless work of Grand Itasca to vaccinate as many people as safely and quickly as possible, with a focus on those who are most vulnerable and need the vaccine the most. At this time, Grand Itasca is able to vaccinate individuals in Phase 1B, Tier 2 and Phase 1B, Tier 3 as well as those over the age of 65, but expects to open criteria to additional groups in the coming days. When criteria changes are ready to be announced, they will be shared on Grand Itasca’s website and Facebook page.

Itasca County Public Health: With the priority remaining those most vulnerable, Itasca County is working with specific groups and locations. Periodic public clinics will be available and announced at the department’s Facebook page and through public announcements.

Scenic Rivers Health Care clinics in Bigfork, Northome, Big Falls, Cook, Tower and Floodwood are vaccinating as supply allows. Additional vaccines will be available at a temporary vaccination clinic in Eveleth starting Tuesday March 30th. Call [877-541-2817](tel:877-541-2817) to get more information or to make an appointment.

Thrifty White Pharmacies: Vaccine availability updated daily for both Grand Rapids pharmacies and throughout their network. Visit their website at www.thriftywhite.com or, for those needing registration assistance, you may call individual locations.

Walmart Pharmacies: Vaccine availability is updated daily at www.walmart.com, including for the Grand Rapids location.



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. Information about vaccination options and current local data and information may be found at the county’s website here: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

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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 April 1.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

Kelly Chandler (218-327-6144 and kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us) or Anna Anttila (anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us).