



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

1209 SE 2nd Ave, Grand Rapids MN 55744

Hearing impaired number TDD: 218-327-5549

(218) 327-2941

www.co.itasca.mn.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOCAL EMERGENCY CARE AT CRITICAL LEVEL DUE TO COVID

Itasca residents urged to stay safe, take precautions

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **November 12, 2021**) – There are no more open beds for critical patients in Itasca County at this point, and nowhere to send those who need one. Local facilities are finding work-arounds, but are increasingly overrun with high levels of patients who need intensive care due to COVID.

“The community needs to know that this has never been more serious,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health. “We are at the crisis levels of 2020, but without the same levels of COVID precautions in place. For your own sakes, dig out your masks and limit your exposure to groups, especially indoors. Go back to social distancing. And definitely get your COVID vaccine and flu shot if you haven’t already—you are far less likely to need an ICU bed if you do.”

Bigfork Valley hospital is feeling the pressure in the northern part of the county. “Beds in the Midwest are at capacity,” said Aaron Saude, the facility’s CEO. “We are currently managing patients in our facility that would benefit from a higher level of care, but there are no beds available to refer them to. Our staff are being pushed to their capacity in all departments of the hospital and senior services. The best advice that I could provide to the community at this point is to stay safe, try not to get injured, and protect yourself from COVID by masking, social distancing, and getting vaccinated.”

“This is a very critical moment for our community,” said Jean MacDonell, president and CEO for Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, the largest facility in the region. “At Grand Itasca, we are seeing historically high numbers of patients presenting to our emergency department and patients needing hospital or intensive care. Our staffing and space is stretched to its very limits. We continue to keep an extra doctor in house to be able to care for as many patients as possible on our medical and intensive care units. But still, we have been on divert, or unable to admit any more patients, more often than not over the last couple weeks. All local and regional facilities are feeling this pressure. When one or more area hospitals are on divert, it puts even more pressure on our facility, especially our emergency department.

“We plead with you to do everything you can do to keep yourself safe in the coming weeks. Especially with deer hunting season, the recent snowfall and the Thanksgiving holiday just around the corner, please do all you can to remain healthy

and safe. Please know that we are committed to being here for our patients when you need us, but we need our community to take this very seriously and step up to do your part.”

Itasca area households and organizations are encouraged to anticipate a high-risk November, with COVID likely to surge beyond peak levels of 2020. As of Nov. 11, the 14-day case rate per 10,000 Itasca residents was 116.4. In the past week alone, 318 more COVID infections were identified among Itasca County residents and the 91st resident died due to COVID, a female in her 70s.

New infections between Oct. 28 and Nov. 10 were among residents living in the following communities:

Bigfork	24
Bovey	43
Calumet	3
Cohasset	50
Coleraine	18
Deer River (includes Ball Club, Inger, Bowstring)	69
Effie	9
Goodland	1
Grand Rapids	237
Keewatin	28
Marble	2
Marcell	4
Max	0
Nashwauk	38
Pengilly	13
S. Lake	1
Spring Lake	0
Swan River	1
Taconite	3
Talmoon	2
Warba	2
Wirt	2

“Given stress on local health care, please plan ahead to the degree possible and be conscious of the best place to access care, both now and in general,” said Chandler. “Listen to your body and assess the severity of your symptoms to prevent overwhelming hospital emergency rooms with mild illnesses or injuries that could be managed elsewhere. You could also avoid a long wait in an ER waiting room when an ER may not be the level of care you need.”

Urgent care, walk-in clinics and online visits help fill a vital gap when you become sick or injured, but your regular doctor is not available and you can’t wait for an appointment.

Hospital emergency departments provide medical care at any time, day or night. They are equipped and staffed for even the most complex or critical needs, including life- and limb-threatening situations ranging from heart attack and stroke to traumatic injuries following a car accident.

For certain medical emergencies such as a heart attack or stroke, calling 911 for an ambulance is always the right decision. This is because paramedics often can begin delivering life-saving treatment on the way to the hospital. You should never drive yourself if you are having severe chest pain or severe bleeding, if you feel like you might faint or if your vision is impaired. When in doubt, please call 911 — what matters most is that you get to the emergency room quickly and safely.

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 through Friday. The Itasca COVID line number is 218-327-6784.

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Itasca County Public Health media contact: Kelly Chandler, 218-327-6144 and Kelly.Chandler@co.itasca.mn.us.

Note to Media: An Itasca County Public Health press briefing will be offered on Thursday Nov. 19 at 10:00 a.m. via ZOOM. A link will be provided in advance.