



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOLIDAYS CAN BE HAPPIER BY AVOIDING COVID

Itasca County marks one year with vaccines

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Dec. 16, 2021**) – New vaccinations in Itasca County have slowed in Itasca County, despite continuing high levels of COVID infections. Once again, health leaders appeal to residents to immediately seek vaccinations and boosters at local clinics and pharmacies.

Itasca County saw its first COVID vaccinations one year ago this week. Since then, 60 percent of eligible Itasca County residents have received at least a first dose of vaccine, a rate that has risen only slightly in recent weeks.

Vaccinations are proving to be effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death in Itasca County. Of the 24,500 Itasca residents fully vaccinated to date, 66 were hospitalized and 12 passed away due to COVID. Only four percent of fully vaccinated Itascans have tested positive for COVID-19.

All those ages five and older may access free COVID vaccinations and boosters at Essentia Health Deer River (Pfizer and J&J), Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital (Pfizer), Scenic Rivers (Pfizer and Moderna), Thrifty White Pharmacy (Pfizer and Moderna), Walgreens (Moderna), Walmart (Pfizer and Moderna), or CVS/Target (Moderna). Those ages five to 17 are specifically eligible for Pfizer, with 16- and 17-year-olds also now eligible for a Pfizer booster dose.

If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have COVID-19, Centers for Disease Control recommends staying home, taking care of yourself, and staying in touch with your doctor. Be sure to get care quickly if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs such as persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips or nail beds.

Testing for COVID is widely available in Itasca County at clinics and hospitals, plus at-home tests available through local and online pharmacies. A free at-home saliva test is available through the Minnesota Department of Health website. Positive at-home tests should be confirmed by a more thorough PCR test at a clinic.

“It’s important to stay in touch with your health provider if you are diagnosed with COVID, or even suspect that you have it,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “The earlier that COVID symptoms are addressed, the more likely you are to stay out of the hospital. And we are seeing too many who are really sick and not getting treatment, some even dying at home without seeing a doctor. Unlike a year ago, we have medicines like monoclonal antibodies that can help with severe COVID-19—especially if they are given early.”

Since Thanksgiving, Itasca County has seen the deaths of 12 residents, bringing the pandemic total to 109 local lives lost due to COVID. Three deaths were identified as COVID just this week.

Itasca area hospitals remain very full due to COVID cases, on top of typical emergencies. As of Dec. 16, Itasca County saw 109 new COVID infections diagnosed in the previous seven days and 214 the week before that. The 14-day case rate per 10,000 Itasca residents is 90.

The average age of infection over the past two weeks in Itasca County was 38, with 24 percent of infections occurring in those age 18 and younger.

“As we enter the Christmas holidays, please remember the signs of COVID: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea,” said Chandler. “Because these symptoms can be similar to flu, testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis.

“Nobody wants to be the one to spread COVID, or even flu, to someone they love who may be extra vulnerable. With precautions and awareness, we still can have happy holidays.”

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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