



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BOTH COVID HOPE AND CONCERN HERE IN ITASCA COUNTY

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Dec. 23, 2021**) – With new treatments on the horizon, Itasca County’s residents can be hopeful about COVID in the long term. In the meantime, however, area residents continue to experience very real effects of the virus.

The Itasca County 14-day case rate per 10,000 residents remains very high but has fallen from 144 to 78. As of Dec. 21, 149 new cases had been diagnosed in the previous seven days and 216 the week before that. Vaccination rates remain at 60 percent of eligible (ages 5+) Itasca residents receiving at least a first dose.

Four more Itasca friends, family and neighbors passed away due to COVID in the last several days, two females in their 50s and 90s and two males in their 60s and 80s.

“It’s especially difficult to lose loved ones during the holidays and our communities grieve with their families,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “The effects and ripple-effects of COVID are weighing heavily on us as this pandemic keeps us in its grip. Please, be sure to reach out to others for support and care whenever needed.

“Behind the pandemic’s veil of pain and frustration, there are reasons to be hopeful right now. New treatments are extremely promising and we are blessed with local care providers who are hanging in there, sacrificing for us.

“It looks like vaccinated and boosted individuals are well protected against the Omicron variant, which also is great news. Vaccines are in good supply here in Itasca County, so it’s important now to encourage those in our family, friend and community circles to get theirs done. Every vaccinated person plays a part in interrupting spread of COVID here, a disease still taking down Itascans of all ages.”

For those under stress and feeling they need to speak with someone, the Itasca area offers a variety of resources. A good place to start is contacting First Call for Help (dial 211) or by texting MN to 741741.

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.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the signs of COVID include 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, and/or diarrhea.

If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have COVID-19, the CDC 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.

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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