



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID SPIKING AGAIN

Both hope and serious concern in Itasca County

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Jan. 14, 2022**) – First the good news: vaccinations continue to slowly rise, vaccines and tests are available here, and new oral COVID treatments are being piloted in Itasca County. Still, our communities are not immune to the infections pummeling the nation. New cases here are spiking and hospitals are full, with more deaths continuing to follow.

Between January 7 and 13, Itasca County saw another 218 new COVID infections, not including those identified through over-the-counter tests. The key 14-day case rate per 10,000 residents, down in the 40s and 50s recently, has doubled again to 104.4, mostly among unvaccinated.

Sadly, Itasca County has identified five additional deaths attributed this week to COVID, bringing the pandemic total to 123.

“Those of us in public health and health care dearly wish the Itasca story was better,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “Please, do everything you can to stay healthy right now. COVID remains unpredictable, and we are seeing very sick Itasca residents of all ages. Vaccination remains our best hope. Testing also is very important, regardless of whether or not you are symptomatic. And, yes, wear a good mask when indoors with others outside of your home.”

Those caring for the sick are under new levels of strain, according to Jon Pederson, vice president of operations for Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, the region’s largest health care facility. “Grand Itasca’s hospital and intensive care unit continue to be full every day and we’re holding patients needing a higher level of care in our emergency department more often than not,” said Pederson. “Staffing is challenged by very high numbers of sick calls from employees, the highest numbers we’ve seen during the pandemic.”

“In some exciting news, we have started a pilot for an oral anti-viral that is available for a select group of very high-risk patients who test positive for COVID,” said Pederson. Earlier this week, Grand Itasca also extended availability of booster doses of vaccine to those 12 years of age and older who completed their primary vaccine series more than five months ago, as well as now offering third doses for those ages 5 to 11 who are moderately-to-severely immunocompromised.

Rising slowly, but surely, 61.4 percent of Itasca County residents have received at least their first dose of COVID vaccine so far. Resources for testing and vaccines in the county are listed at the local public health site, www.co.itasca.mn.us. For appointments at Grand Itasca, call 218-326-7344.

As of January 1 and ending February 28, Minnesota families can receive \$200 for getting their child 5 - 11 years old vaccinated. For details, visit the State of Minnesota website: mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/vaccine-rewards/kids-deserve-a-shot.

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: The next Itasca County COVID press briefing is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 20, 10:00-10:30 a.m. via ZOOM. A link will be provided in advance.