



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ITASCA COVID RATES LOWER, STILL DANGEROUS

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Feb. 4, 2022**) – Thankfully, Itasca County has seen its first decline in rates of COVID infection in several weeks, although spread of the virus remains extremely high here.

As of Feb. 3, new cases diagnosed over the past seven days numbered 259, down from 443 identified the previous week. The most current 14-day case rate per 10,000 Itasca residents is 157. These data are based on lab-tested individuals and do not include home (antigen) tests.

Two additional Itasca County residents were identified this week as passing away due to COVID, bringing the pandemic toll here to 130 deaths. Another unfortunate milestone is that Itasca County has passed the 10,000-case threshold in total number of COVID cases, meaning at least one in every four Itasca residents has contracted COVID in the past two years.

“We have begun to see cases decline again as more and more people have gone back to mask-wearing, avoiding crowds and keeping distance whenever possible,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “Still, we have extremely high levels of COVID transmission in our communities and continue to see our neighbors get sick, some deathly sick. If you are not vaccinated and boosted, please begin your series as soon as possible. And, if your child ages 5-11 get fully vaccinated by Feb. 28, families can get a \$200 Visa gift card through Minnesota’s ‘Kids Deserve a Shot’ program. For children not yet vaccinated, the last day to begin a vaccination series and be eligible for this incentive is Feb. 7.”

Vaccines are widely available throughout Itasca County at clinics, pharmacies and special public health events.

Laboratory COVID testing and at-home tests also are available throughout the county. Laboratory (PCR) tests can be taken at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, Scenic Rivers Health Care and Essentia Deer River and Grand Rapids with no limits on criteria such as symptoms. Walgreens offers both antigen and PCR tests at their drive-through window, with appointment. The state’s at-home PCR COVID test, a no-cost saliva test, is available through the Vault website: <https://learn.vaulthealth.com/state-of-minnesota/>. At-home antigen tests are usually available at pharmacies throughout the region. While supplies are getting better, local pharmacies and retailers report that their access to at-home test kits can sometimes be limited.

The Biden administration recently announced the availability of 400 million N95 respirator masks being made available to the public to help fight the spread of COVID. The masks are coming from the Strategic National Stockpile of

protective equipment and are being distributed to pharmacies and community health centers. In Itasca County, only Walmart pharmacy has received any of these masks which, when they are in stock, are available at the store entrance.

Other high-quality, tight-fitting masks, known as KN95s, also are being distributed by the State of Minnesota to various public health, educational and other public facilities to help stop the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron virus, which more easily evades looser-fitting masks. Most pharmacies and many retailers have N95 and/or KN95 masks available for purchase.

Itasca residents with questions or concerns may leave them at the Itasca County COVID message line, with calls returned 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 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: Itasca County Public Health will provide a media briefing via ZOOM on Thursday, February 10, 10:00-10:30 a.m. A link will be provided prior to the briefing.