



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

ITASCA COUNTY IMPROVING, LOOKING FORWARD TO RELIEF FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Feb. 10, 2022**) – Itasca County appears to be beginning to recover from a rough fall and winter with COVID-19.

Vaccination rates have inched up, with 25,264 residents receiving at least a first dose--nearly 60 percent of all residents and 62 percent of those eligible (ages five and older). As a state, 74 percent of Minnesotans have received at least a first dose.

For a second consecutive week, the laboratory-confirmed rate of spread in Itasca County has dropped significantly. The all-time high when measured as a 14-day case rate per 10,000 Itasca residents was 172 two weeks ago and is down to 108 this week.

As the largest testing site in the area, Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital reports fewer numbers of laboratory (PCR) COVID tests being requested, from an average of more than 100 per day down to 69 per day. The positivity rate of those tests, however, remains quite high at 21%. According to Jean MacDonell, president and CEO for Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital and Fairview Range, “We want to see that positivity rate down below five percent, so we definitely have a way to go.”

MacDonell said that the clinics and hospitals continue to offer vaccines and that they also expect to soon see emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration of the Pfizer vaccine for those ages six months to four years old.

“We are not out of the woods yet, but we do hope we are moving in the right direction and into a recovery phase,” said MacDonell. “The COVID impact to our organizations does feel a little lighter in recent weeks. In addition to caring for our patients, we also are focused on our employees who have been working long, hard hours during this surge. They are caring for patients who are sicker than we are used to, and in some cases should not be at our facility but transferred somewhere they can get a next level of care. The stress and burnout of our frontline workers is real and we’re hoping to see a prolonged decrease in COVID here so we can give staff some relief and time to focus on restoring their energy. Our community needs them.”

“I agree. Our community needs our frontline health care workers. Our public health team is so appreciative of all who have worked tirelessly for nearly two years now to keep us safe,” said Kelly Chandler, division manager for Itasca County Public Health. “This past year, especially, we have strived to find a balance all over the county. We are balancing safety

from this very serious virus with continuing our activities and promoting connections with others, so important to our mental, physical, educational, and economic wellbeing.”

Also on the front lines of the pandemic have been those providing early child care and learning, such as at Invest Early. Because of its affiliation with several federal programs, Invest Early is required to strictly follow CDC guidelines while working to meet the needs of children and parents.

“We’ve definitely seen challenges,” said Jan Reindl, executive director for Invest Early. “I celebrate our staff, who have stepped up over and over by showing grace, flexibility, understanding and willingness to help each other. They have found creative ways to provide resources to struggling families and covered shifts for each other when someone was ill. They have shown love, empathy and shared the joy of learning with hundreds of children.

“This has been a challenging time for our communities. And when we have to close a classroom due to exposure or infection, many families are left with no care while they are trying to work. But when we look at the joy and the aha discovery that a child gets when they have an opportunity to play, explore, feel safe with an adult that cares for them – we can celebrate. Their smiles and joy keep us inspired.”

Area school districts also are focused on the overall health of students, said Pat Rendle, who chairs the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC). “The primary goal of every district is to keep kids in school, although each of our schools are working to get there in slightly different ways. The journey for Grand Rapids is a lot different than for Hill City or Floodwood, which is different than it was at the beginning of the pandemic when the state took charge. We have local control now, although it is more complicated. The good news is that we get help and are learning from each other across the region. These are difficult decisions.”

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.

--END--

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