



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ITASCA COVID CASES GROW TO 22, BUSINESS COMMUNITY RESPONDING

(Grand Rapids, Minn., May 4, 2020) – Itasca County’s increased testing has yielded a significant rise in laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health department director. As of noon Monday, May 4, the county had 22 laboratory confirmed cases among its residents, with several tests still pending.

Minnesota Department of Health has identified Itasca County as the site of a congregate care outbreak at The Emeralds at Grand Rapids. Marc Halpert, chief operating officer of the facility’s management company, Monarch Healthcare, issued the following statement:

“First off, we would like to thank the Grand Rapids and Itasca County community for all of their support during this difficult time. Additionally, we would like to thank our family members, our residents and tenants, but certainly our staff. Over the past week, we have been fighting to stop the spread of COVID-19 and have been able to prevent it from many.

“At this time, we do have eight staff members that have tested positive, all asymptomatic. We also have six residents currently in-house with COVID, all on one unit, and all but one are asymptomatic. We look forward to keeping all of our residents, tenants, and staff safe. Thank you.”

Medical facilities in Bigfork, Deer River and Grand Rapids all are providing COVID-19 testing for the Itasca area, with protocols based on Minnesota Department of Health criteria.

Bigfork Valley

In collaboration with Scenic Rivers Health Services Clinic in Bigfork, Bigfork Valley is now offering curbside testing by appointment Monday through Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. “We continue to follow the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) testing guidelines, which now includes testing of all symptomatic patients,” said Angela Kleffman, chief operating officer. “We expect to increase our capacity soon by offering rapid testing on-site in certain circumstances.”



Essentia Health

“As Gov. Walz called for recently, our testing now includes testing for all symptomatic patients,” said Monique Fox, administrator. “This is effective immediately at our Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota sites. The process for receiving a test at the Deer River Hospital mobile testing site hasn’t changed. Individuals must still start an E-Visit (preferred) or call our COVID-19 hotline at 1-833-494-0836 to be screened and get a medical order before going to a mobile testing site. E-Visit and hotline COVID-19 screening is still free. The mobile testing site is located at the West Entrance by the flagpole. Essentia Grand Rapids providers also adhere to the expanded testing criteria for all symptomatic patients and can see patients via a virtual visit to evaluate symptoms and assess needs for a testing order per the above protocols.

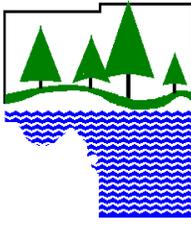
“Essentia Deer River now staffs a Respiratory Symptoms clinic that is open by appointment Monday through Friday from 12-5 to have your symptoms evaluated through an in-person visit in a safe manner. If you have a cloth mask, we ask that you wear it to your appointment. Please call 218-246-8275 (Deer River) / 218-322-4900 (Grand Rapids) and state that you are seeking an appointment in the Respiratory Symptoms Clinic and would like the call transferred to the Deer River or Grand Rapids Clinic scheduling staff. When you arrive for your appointment you will need to park at the West entrance by the sign and call the number provided to you to be escorted from your vehicle into the exam room. We want you to know we are here for you!

“In order to best serve our patients and protect our staff, in addition to the above testing, Essentia facilities will also be testing for any patients that are scheduled for surgery. These patients will be tested 72 hours prior to surgery to allow for test results to be received and during this time the patient is required to be self-quarantined then upon arrival for surgery/procedure the patient is again screened for any symptoms. If a patient requires emergent surgery, Essentia Deer River has access to onsite rapid testing. All Inpatient admissions from the emergency room will also be tested. Any patient requiring discharge back into a congregate setting and any patient transferred via EMS to another facility will also have testing performed.”

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital

“We continue to use our curbside process for COVID-19 testing of ambulatory (clinic) patients,” said Jean MacDonnell, president and CEO. “Our current criteria include testing of symptomatic patients that have high risk medical conditions, are 65 or older and/or have had known exposure to someone with COVID-19.

“We have also expanded testing criteria to include pre-scheduled obstetrical and surgical patients as well as residents of congregate living facilities. Test results for ambulatory tests are turned around in 24-72 hours while inpatient tests take about 12-24 hours. We’re expecting to be able to do some limited on-site rapid testing in the near future.”



During a briefing of the Itasca COVID Response Stakeholders network this week, Chandler said that, “Itasca Public Health has indication of community spread in the county, meaning we have cases with no identified source of infection. We have had positive cases that are not showing physical symptoms of illness, and it could be spread unknowingly. Masks and face coverings are not mandatory, but they are certainly recommended because they prevent spread to others in public spaces.

“Please continue to do all those things the Centers for Disease Control have asked us to do. Continue to social distance – six feet away from persons who live outside of your household and cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze. Wash hands with soap and water. Don’t go anywhere if you are sick. This is how we protect our families, neighbors and friends.”

Chandler added, “Businesses looking to reopen safely have reached out to Itasca County Public Health to inquire about best practices for screening of employees, patrons and social distancing practices. We are pleased that businesses are taking a proactive approach and are planning ahead.”

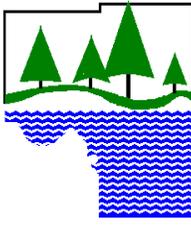
According to Itasca Economic Development Corporation president and CEO Tamara Lowney, businesses across the county are balancing many factors, including keeping people safe while also preparing for reopening their facilities. Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) creates and retains quality jobs in Itasca County through education, research, and connections with businesses.

“During the COVID-19 crisis, we quickly shifted gears into guiding small businesses to and through the multitude of resources available to them,” said Lowney. “Our small business developers assisted over 150 businesses with federal and state funding as well as our own Itasca Small Business Relief Fund (ISBRF) Loan Program.

“To date, through the ISBRF, we have approved 24 loans, totaling more than \$450,000 in our community. Our team at IEDC, as well as our partners from APEX, CEDA and the Entrepreneur Fund, worked tirelessly providing a COVID-19 dedicated page on our website, <https://www.itascadv.org/covid-19-updates>, Facebook updates, <https://www.facebook.com/ItascaEDC/>, as well as our Business Impact Zoom Meetings. Please join us every Wednesday through May, at 1:00 PM, to hear more from small businesses, resources, and updates on COVID-19 impacts, <https://zoom.us/j/605752306>.”

“Additional sanitation requirements do pose some challenges for businesses,” said Bud Stone, president of Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce. “That being said, people as a rule will move and participate where they feel safest, so best practices will definitely have dividends. From the statewide perspective of larger businesses, their employees become their customers with regards to safety and security.”

Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital is the largest employer in the Itasca area, as well as a health care provider. Dr. Dan Soular, vice president of medical affairs and family medicine physician at



Grand Itasca, shared his advice with other employers: “Most importantly, we encourage you to maintain a healthy workplace for your staff and customers, by ensuring that social distancing can take place, frequently disinfecting all surfaces, expecting or requiring that staff wear homemade masks, and actively encouraging staff to stay home from work if they are sick.

“If your staff have had exposure to someone who tests positive for COVID-19 or if they show symptoms and have a high-risk medical condition, they may be tested. A test result can bring peace of mind and also help you navigate their return to work plan. The Centers for Disease Control offers recommendations for circumstances of known exposure, symptomatic or asymptomatic and with and without testing results. Navigating staff illness in this COVID-19 world is no easy feat, but by adhering to their advice, we'll continue to protect our frontline workers and the most vulnerable people in our community.

Stories of how Itasca area businesses Timberwolf Restaurant and Inn, MDI, Unwined Up North, Acheson Tire, Nashwauk Market and River Grand Senior Living are strong and battling to recover from the COVID pandemic can be found online at <https://www.itascadv.org/covid-19-updates/itasca-strong>. Itasca Strong is a county-wide collaboration between [Itasca Economic Development Corporation](#), [Visit Grand Rapids](#), [Grand Rapids Downtown Business Association](#), [Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce](#), [The City of Grand Rapids](#), [The Blandin Foundation](#) and [Itasca County](#).

For businesses creating written response plans, the Itasca County Emergency Operations Center is available to review plans and provide insights based on local experiences and best practices. Plans can be emailed to iceoc@co.itasca.mn.us.

Itasca County’s enhanced Call Center now provides live staffing every day between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at 218-327-6784 for those with COVID-related issues and needs.

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