



# ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

## ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER

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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

### ITASCA COUNTY RESIDENTS ASKED TO WEAR A FABRIC MASK WHENEVER IN PUBLIC AS COVID-19 CASES AND DEATHS KEEP RISING HERE

(Grand Rapids, Minn., May 18, 2020) – All ages are being infected with the COVID-19 virus, according to Itasca County statistics. As of 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 18, the county has seen at least 50 laboratory-confirmed cases and, unfortunately, one additional death of a male in his 60s since last Friday, reported Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Health department manager. Due to privacy concerns, no additional details will be provided by Itasca County Health about the deceased.

“We all would like to believe that Itasca County residents are safer this week than last week, that the governor allowing the stay at home order to expire means that we can go back to normal. But we are not done with this thing yet,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health department manager.

“By staying at home, Minnesotans bought some time for us to prepare to take care of those who are sick,” said Chandler. “For example, we have seen a slow rise in the need for ICU beds, rather than a surge.

“As society opens back up, we will continue to see our neighbors, friends, even ourselves continue to battle this virus. Sometimes we will have to fight for our lives. Itasca County facilities are ready.”

#### Bigfork Valley

“The health and safety of our patients, staff, and community are our top priority,” said Angela Kleffman, chief operating officer, Bigfork Valley. “We have used the time that our state and community have given us to plan and prepare to respond to COVID-19. During this time, we have implemented increased infection control precautions and social distancing measures to



reduce the risk of transmission while still providing the same quality services for which we are known.

“As we begin to reschedule outpatient services and surgical procedures at Bigfork Valley, we keep these same precautions in mind. We continue to monitor all staff and visitors upon entry to our facility and have implemented universal masking for all who access our campus. We have developed plans to protect our patients and staff by staggering appointments and eliminating waiting room time to limit unnecessary contact.

“Curbside testing is now available by appointment in Bigfork to all symptomatic patients. We plan to utilize onsite rapid testing for all surgical patients the day of their procedure and are hopeful that we will be able to increase our testing ability with this equipment as supplies become available.

“We are confident that we have implemented necessary changes and developed plans to adapt to COVID-19 and are prepared to serve our community at a greater capacity.”

#### Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital

Grand Itasca currently is offering COVID-19 and antibody testing seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Those who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or would like to receive antibody testing should call the appointment line at [218-326-7344](tel:218-326-7344) for a telephone visit with a provider. If the provider determines that the patient meets qualifications for either of these tests, they will provide them instructions for testing. There is a lot of research being done on antibody testing, but not yet a lot of proof on the meaning of the result.

Starting next week, Grand Itasca will be starting to perform elective surgeries following the roadmap put in place by Governor Walz. They also continue to provide a lot of care virtually, through e-visits, telephone visits and video visits. The clinic again is offering mammograms and will soon be re-opening its cardiac rehab department for patient care as well. In-person visits are available for various clinic appointments that cannot wait. The walk-in clinic also remains open seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the Emergency Department is always open.

“If you need care, please do not hesitate to come in or call us to schedule an appointment,” said Jean MacDonell, president and CEO of Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital. “We are ready to care for you safely.”

#### Essentia Health

For active non-emergent, respiratory symptoms or other COVID symptoms, Essentia offers a respiratory clinic in Deer River. The Respiratory Clinic is open by appointment Monday through Friday from 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. to evaluate symptoms evaluated through an in-person visit in a



safe manner. If you have a cloth mask, you are asked to wear it to your appointment. Please call 218-246-8275 (Deer River) or GR 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 (flagpole) by the sign and call the number provided to you to be escorted from your vehicle into the exam room.

Essentia also operates a mobile testing site in Itasca County at the Deer River clinic. The entrance is by the main campus sign (near the flagpole) located on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE and 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE. You must complete an e-visit, get screened per Minnesota Department of Health testing guidelines and have an order entered for a COVID test prior to arriving at the mobile testing site.

The Deer River and Grand Rapids clinics are staffed and appointments are available should you need to be evaluated via video or in-person.

Deer River Emergency Department visits are open, available to treat emergencies (lacerations, fishhook injuries, orthopedic injuries, acute respiratory problems, strokes, heart problems, seizures, etc.). If you are being seen for severe respiratory concerns or fever, wear a mask and make this known immediately upon your arrival.

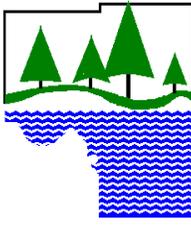
Expansion in testing capability at Essentia has helped to safely offer more face-to-face visits, surgeries and procedures. Essentia has developed a clinic re-opening safety checklist that is part of the evaluation process to gradually increase face-to-face visits within departments and clinics. "As we are calling our patients to schedule their services that may have been delayed, we want our patients to know that we are doing everything we can to keep them safe," said Monique Fox, administrator.

COVID-related calls to Itasca County's Call Center (218-327-6784) have evened out, prompting the county to scale back live staffing of the center to Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Messages may be left after hours and on weekends.

#### Volunteers create masks for those in need

Even beyond the Itasca area's medical facilities, volunteers have shared their gifts to protect others. Elder Care has taken a lead on the mask-making front as well as providing services for the communities' elders.

"In addition to continuing with the six-foot rule of social distancing and frequently washing hands, the 'Stay Safe MN' executive order that begins on May 18, 2020 asks Minnesotans wear a fabric mask whenever in public," said Renee Bymark, executive director, Elder Circle. "Fabric masks don't replace medical-grade personal protective equipment, but should the mask wearer unknowingly be a carrier, a fabric mask can help prevent the spread of the virus. The fabric masks can be washed and reused."



ElderCircle is offering fabric masks for those in need. The agency will arrange non-contact pickup at their office at the Itasca County Family YMCA. They may be reached by voice mail ( 218-999-9233 x277) or email ([ecircle@eldercircle.org](mailto:ecircle@eldercircle.org)). Include your name and telephone number in your message.

Elder Care asks that you limit your request to two masks per adult. Both elastic style or tie-style masks are available (tie-style does not interfere with hearing aids). While there is no cost, donations are appreciated.

“Thank you to the many volunteers who are sharing their sewing skills and supplies so this critical community need can be filled,” said Bymark.

Donations of masks, fabric or elastic may be dropped off in a yellow and black bin cabled to a metal fence outside of the ElderCircle office at the Itasca Family YMCA. Please include your name and contact info. Monetary donations are appreciated and can be sent via postal service to ElderCircle, 400 River Road Suite 1, Grand Rapids, MN 55744

#### Other helpful resources

Mayo Clinic: experts changed their minds and now recommend cloth masks. Story here:

<https://tinyurl.com/mayoonmasks>

CDC: How to make a variety of cloth masks: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Governor’s Stay Safe order: <https://tinyurl.com/MNStaySafe>

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#### *Notes to media:*

*MDH charts of Itasca County’s cases over time and cases by age. Photo available of ElderCircle’s stacks of homemade masks.*

*Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Tuesdays at 1:00 p.m. and Fridays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. Recordings available. Contact [anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us](mailto:anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us) for more information and to submit a question.*

#### Media Contacts

Please contact each organization individually or Itasca County staff:

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Source: Minnesota Department of Health

