



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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Visit us at: [www.co.itasca.mn.us](http://www.co.itasca.mn.us)

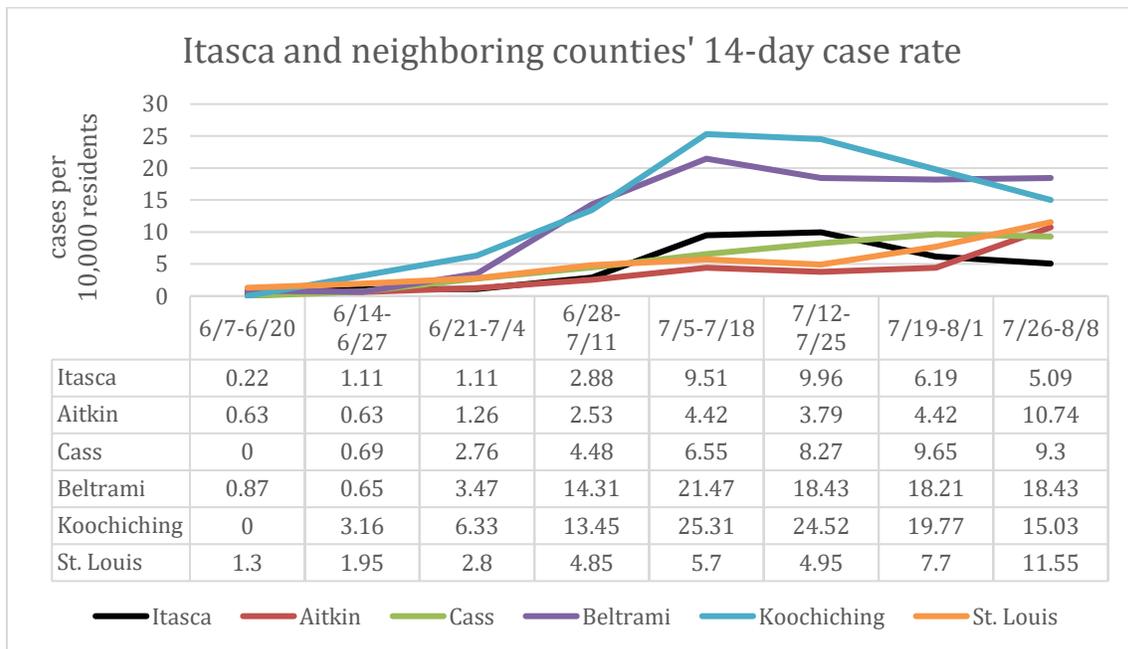
*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

COVID-19 CONTINUES TO SPREAD IN ITASCA COUNTY, ALTHOUGH SLOWED

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **August 20, 2020**) – As Itasca County area students prepare to go back to the classroom or access education online, efforts to wear face coverings, keep physical distance, avoid crowds and wash hands are helping to slow the disease’s spread.

As of 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 20, the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 stands at 154, an increase of five since Monday. No additional COVID-related deaths in the county have occurred since early June. Itasca County cases range from patients six months to 94 years, with COVID spreading primarily through community contact (from both known and unknown sources).

Minnesota schools are able to customize their reopening plans to the situation in their individual counties and communities. A key piece of information informing these plans is to what degree the spread of COVID-19 there is under control, using a 14-day case rate. The most recent 14-day rate available for Itasca County is 5.09 cases per 10,000 residents.



Source: Minnesota Department of Health



“In order to keep our schools and businesses open, it is critical that we continue to make choices that protect each other,” said Kelly Chandler, department manager, Itasca County Public Health. “With Labor Day and fall weather on the horizon, let’s keep it up. Every effort to mask, keep physical distance, avoid crowds and stay healthy matters.”

Being alert to COVID-19 symptoms and catching them early will help to contain any outbreaks, according to Kelly Payne, registered school nurse for Greenway Public Schools.

“The symptoms associated with COVID-19 include new onset cough or shortness of breath by themselves or at least two of the following: fever (100.4°F or higher), chills, muscle pain, sore throat, fatigue, congestion, loss of sense of smell or taste, or gastrointestinal symptoms of diarrhea, vomiting, or nausea,” said Payne. “These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after you are exposed to the virus. Not everyone with COVID-19 has all of these symptoms, and some people may not have any symptoms.”

It’s also important to keep an eye on mental health and the stress that naturally comes with disruption and change, said Nate Elsen, counselor for Grand Rapids High School. “When it comes to helping your student manage stress, help them create a plan,” he recommends. “Encourage your student to identify what activities, experiences and interactions allow them to feel more stress. Have your student identify how she or he feels stress in her or his body (e.g., racing heart, stomachache, bouncing leg).

“Work with your student to commit to coping skills when (and especially before) your student starts to feel stressed. For example, explore things like, ‘When I start to feel my heart race, I will practice deep breathing.’ Also ask your student how she/he would like *you* or another adult to respond to her/him when the above stress warning signs are observed, such as: ‘I would like to be given a hug when I start to bounce my leg,’ or ‘I would like to be left alone when I am short or frustrated, I will come back to the conversation when I am ready.’”

One way Itasca County communities are supporting families in the transition back to school is through a student mask drive.

Mask Up Itasca, a group that includes representatives from Bigfork Valley Hospital, Blandin Foundation, City of Grand Rapids, ElderCircle, Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, ISD 318, Itasca County Public Health, Itasca Economic Development Corporation, Ross Resources, Second Harvest North Central Food Bank, and Visit Grand Rapids have partnered with community-based mask-making volunteer groups such as Mask Mania 2020 to provide free fabric masks to school-age children returning to school in a few short weeks.

Volunteers who are interested in sewing masks may contact P&D Sewing at 218-326-2953 to arrange a pickup of materials needed to make school-age masks. Distribution of the back-to-school masks will be facilitated by the Mask Up Itasca group prior to the start of school.



Questions about the back-to-school mask drive may be directed to ElderCircle at 218-999-9233 x277 or [ecircle@eldercircle.org](mailto:ecircle@eldercircle.org). Staff is working remotely and are addressing voice mails and emails daily.

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 – Friday. The Itasca COVID line number is 218-327-6784.

### Helpful Resources

Itasca County area mental health resources: [www.stableembrace.com](http://www.stableembrace.com)

Local emergency resources: [www.firstcall211.net](http://www.firstcall211.net)

Stress and teens/young adults: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping/young-adults.html> - Centers for Disease Control

Coping: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/for-parents.html> - Centers for Disease Control

Mental Health Back to School Toolkit: <https://www.mhanational.org/back-school> - Mental Health America

Back to School Tips for Parents: <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-with-special-needs-go-back-to-school/> - Child Mind Institute

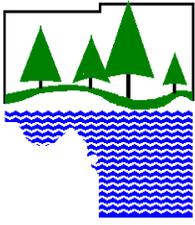
Encourage children as they head back to school:  
<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return> - UNICEF

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*Note to media: Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. The next briefing will be Sept. 3. Recordings available. Contact [anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us](mailto:anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us) for more information.*

### Itasca County Public Health media contacts

Kelly Chandler (218-327-6144 and [Kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us](mailto:Kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us)) or Anna Anttila ([anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us](mailto:anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us)).



**BACK TO SCHOOL  
MASK DRIVE**  
#MaskUpTasca

An illustration of two children wearing face masks. On the left, a girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a yellow shirt and a white face mask, is pointing upwards with both hands. On the right, a boy with dark skin and hair, wearing a blue and green striped shirt, blue shorts, and a white face mask, is waving with both hands. The background consists of large, overlapping circles in shades of blue and yellow.