



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VACCINES FOR ITASCA AREA SENIORS BECOMING INCREASINGLY AVAILABLE

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Feb. 18, 2021**) – Sixteen percent of Itasca County residents have received at least a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine through local health care facilities, public health clinics and pharmacies. Among those being offered the vaccine are all area schools’ staff, early childhood providers and the region’s 13,000 residents over age 65.

As most residents await vaccination, COVID-19 spread in Itasca County remains a reality. Over the past seven days, 32 cases have been newly diagnosed and 90 over the past 14 days. When measured as a 14-day average per 10,000 residents, the rate has hovered around 20 over the past week. Itasca County has seen no additional deaths.

“We are very excited to be less than a year into this pandemic and have vaccinations available to us,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “However, they are arriving in Minnesota and Itasca County in limited amounts and provided to priority groups including those age 65 and older, healthcare and emergency medical service, schools and childcare providers.

“Because vaccines are not readily available to the public at large, we still must do the things we know slow the spread of COVID-19, including masking, staying at least six feet apart, and not gathering in groups. We continue to see fewer cases in Itasca right now, which took a lot of work and sacrifice over the holidays to get to these lower numbers. We do not want to lose the ground we have gained. Stay strong until vaccines are available to the broader public and until enough of us have been vaccinated to ensure herd immunity.”

Vaccine availability and protocols vary by facility. Most reservations are accessed online and many are finding that using a laptop is better than trying to make a reservation on a smart phone. Area seniors who may have limited or no access to Internet, or who are struggling with the technology, may work with volunteers and staff of ElderCircle in Grand Rapids to apply for vaccine reservations. Due to high call volumes, seniors who are able are encouraged to first try completing online reservations on their own before calling ElderCircle for assistance if needed. ElderCircle may be reached at 218-999-9233.

The following are updates from vaccinators in Itasca County:



Essentia Health Care

Through Tuesday, Feb. 16, Essentia Health-Deer River had administered 1,280 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. That includes 1,008 first doses and 272 second doses. And while we can't wait to ramp up our vaccination efforts and immunize even more people in our community against this virus, supplies currently are limited. Consequently, our current focus is on providing second doses; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the second dose be given within 42 days of the first. We hope to resume first doses in the near future.

We are following guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health, which determines vaccination priority, and we continue to vaccinate those in Phase 1A, as well as individuals aged 65-plus. In addition to making vaccine available to our community at our hospital location - we are excited to support underserved community members and those that may be less able to come to our vaccination sites with our mobile vaccination outreach team. Groups that are good candidates for our mobile outreach team are being identified through our partnership with Itasca County Public Health. We are committed to safely and efficiently vaccinating as many people as possible throughout Itasca County. Information regarding vaccine eligibility, scheduling and frequently asked questions is available at the Essentia website:

<https://www.essentiahealth.org/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine-information/>

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital continues to vaccinate patients ages 75 and up with a commitment to vaccinating this group as quickly, efficiently and safely as possible. At this time, vaccine appointments are opened up on a weekly basis, each Monday at 9:00 AM. The quickest way to schedule an appointment is through MyChart, though patients are also able to call the appointment line at 218-326-7344. For those who live in or near Grand Rapids, Grand Itasca is now offering a will call standby list. Should any additional doses become available throughout the week, patients on this list are called to come in for their vaccinations. Updates and more information about our vaccination process can be found on the Grand Itasca website and Facebook page.

Itasca County Public Health

Itasca County's public health staff has focused vaccinations on state-identified priority groups such as skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, state-licensed human services facilities such as group homes, treatment facilities, foster care providers, etc. Given progress with these priority groups, public health is able to host a vaccination clinic on Feb. 22 for those over age 65, although supplies are limited and the 260 available reservations filled within hours. Itasca County does not have additional clinics planned at this point, but will continue to watch for every opportunity to quickly vaccinate residents as supplies become available.



Leech Lake Band/IHS Cass Lake

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's vaccine rollout is expanding to include all IHS-eligible patients age 18 and older, with elders still given priority. Reservations may be made by calling the band's COVID-19 hotline at 218-368-4763.

Scenic Rivers Health Services

Scenic Rivers Health Services is currently scheduling appointments at our medical clinics for patients 65 and older to receive Moderna vaccinations. Appointments are limited according to vaccine supply. Please call 218-361-3274 for vaccine inquires in Bigfork and 218-361-3297 for Cook. Supplies are limited and call volumes are high, so we do appreciate your patience when calling.

To date, Scenic Rivers Clinic in Bigfork has completed over 1,000 vaccines and close to 3,000 organizationally. We continue to follow guidance for Community Health Centers set forth by Minnesota Department of Health.

Scenic Rivers is very excited to be able to provide vaccination in an effort to fight this pandemic. Please remember the importance of wearing a mask, social distancing and frequent hand washing as we all work together to stay healthy. Let's get through this pandemic and look forward to a better year in 2021! Visit our website at www.scenicrivershealth.org for more information about Scenic Rivers and our locations.

Thrifty White Pharmacies

Thrifty White has been providing COVID vaccines to LTC facilities in Minnesota and North Dakota since the end of December. We have almost 100 locations and all have been active in serving our LTC communities and retail communities.

Last week, Minnesota Thrifty White locations received Moderna vaccine allocation to provide to the public. Between the two Thrifty White locations in Grand Rapids, we received 500 doses for retail patients. We currently are providing vaccines to 65+ and appointments can be made at thriftywhite.com. Openings will be listed by state. If our location is not listed, we currently do not have any available openings, but please check back later. We encourage patients to regularly check the website as cancellations will create openings and they are posted immediately.

There currently is a delay of Moderna vaccine, but we are expected to receive over 100 doses of Pfizer vaccine per store starting next week. Expect our next appointments to be posted to our website within the next few days for next Tuesday and Wednesday - subject to change.

We are so excited to be able to serve our community and help reduce COVID in our community.



Walmart Pharmacy

Vaccines available for eligible Minnesotans, including at the Grand Rapids Walmart, may be reserved online at <http://www.walmart.com/COVIDvaccine>.

State Sites

For those over age 65 who are willing and able to travel to Duluth, Minneapolis or Rochester, three large vaccination sites now are available depending on supply. Slots at these sites will be provided on a lottery basis. More information may be found at the state's COVID site (<https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/find-vaccine/community-vaccination-program/index.jsp>).

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. Information about vaccination options and current local data and information may be found at the county's website here: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

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Media briefing: Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. The next scheduled briefing will be March 4.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

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