



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID IMPACTING AREA HEALTH SYSTEMS, COMMUNITIES, FAMILIES

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Nov. 13, 2020**) – COVID-19 cases in Itasca County continue their record-breaking climb. Over the past seven days, the county has seen 241 new cases and 414 over the past two weeks. The 14-day rate of positive cases per 10,000 Itasca residents also grew to 89.6.

As of Nov. 12, the number of Itasca residents hospitalized with COVID stands at 14 and seven are currently in intensive care units.

Anna Hussman, a Grand Rapids resident in her early 30s, has suffered through COVID-19 infection and, along with her husband, continues to fight lingering symptoms. “Being younger adults, my husband and I didn’t think COVID would affect us it the way it has,” she said in a community briefing hosted by Itasca County Public Health. “But people need to know that it can affect anybody, no matter your age, no matter your gender. It starts at home, with teaching our children that this is no joke.”

“In the spirit of gratitude, we are so, so grateful for our Itasca residents who are doing their part by staying six feet apart, avoiding gatherings and wearing their masks,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “Unfortunately, we also know that not everyone is helping us minimize the spread and keeping our healthcare resources available for the most emergent care needs. In Itasca, we have outbreaks related to gatherings in bars, at weddings, gathering in homes and garages for parties.”

“I’m here on behalf of my colleagues in health care to tell you that we are very frustrated with our community’s behavior,” said Dr. Phil Imholte, family practice physician at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital. “The blatant disregard for mask-wearing and people gathering with large groups of others have led to rapid and nearly uncontrollable spread of COVID. Due to the surge in COVID driven by community spread, our hospitals are full.

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe tribal communities, intertwined with surging Cass, Beltrami and Itasca Counties, also have seen recent rise in virus spread.

“We can see COVID swirling closer, and yet we still carry on,” said Vince Rock, interim health director for Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. “A lot of people here are giving all they’ve got, and still there’s a lot of need out there. This is about community survival. What we’re doing is trying to



watch out for each other, consider and care for each other. Wearing masks doesn't just protect me, it protects you too.

"Do we want to be lucky, or deliberate? As we plan for the future, we think of the past and all the things we could have done. Now we have to be purposeful and deliberate so we can avoid desperation in the future."

As COVID-19 cases grow statewide, options for testing also grow in addition to those locally available at clinics. Minnesota Department of Health has announced additional saliva testing sites opening on Nov. 18, including at the National Guard Armory in Hibbing. Home saliva testing kits also are available to any person in Minnesota, delivered to your home with expedited shipping (go to

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/athome.html>).

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. Current local data and information also can be found at the county's website here: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

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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 scheduled briefing will be Dec. 3. There will be no additional November briefing, unless need dictates. Contact anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us for more information.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

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