



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ITASCA COUNTY PREPARED AS IT AWAITS MORE VACCINE

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Jan. 18, 2021**) – As vaccines work their way toward Itasca County residents in greater quantities and some community restrictions have been relaxed, the need to stand strong against COVID-19 infections remains.

As of Jan. 18, Itasca County has seen a slight uptick in new cases, largely attributable to post-holidays gathering. Over the past seven days, 57 new cases have been diagnosed among residents and 118 over the past 14 days. As measured by a 14-day average of cases per 10,000 residents, Itasca County's rate is 25.3 (up slightly over the past week and down significantly from a high of 129 in November).

Reports from the large COVID testing event in Grand Rapids between Jan. 6 and 8 are back, showing that 391 people sought tests, with only three resulting in a positive diagnosis.

“The efforts of Itasca residents to stay safe and protect each other have made a huge difference,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “We have driven down the rate of new infections in our area and now we need to stay strong over the next weeks and months until we have widespread vaccination. We still have family and neighbors being infected, hospitalized or suffering lasting effects of this disease. We are all weary, but we cannot stop. Our fight is not yet over.”

Today, Minnesota Department of Health announced the upcoming availability of regional vaccination clinics for two key groups, those over age 65 and those who work in schools and childcare providers. Mountain Iron will be the location of the Northeast regional site, although details such as dates and the registration process are still to be determined.

“This can be an especially confusing time given continually changing federal and state guidance regarding vaccination,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “I urge Itasca County residents to remember that when it is their turn to receive their vaccination, they will hear from their health care provider, their employer or through county announcements.

“Itasca County is nearly complete in its vaccination of health care workers and, once we and our vaccination partners receive additional supplies, we are prepared to quickly move on to additional groups.



“Itasca County residents should know that if you are in a priority group with higher risk, you will be contacted by your health care provider when it is your turn to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. For Itasca residents at lower risk, widespread announcements will be made when vaccines are also available for them.”

Steps an individual can take to get ready for vaccination include: 1) ensure that you have a primary care physician and that you are signed up for any online or text-based communications tools offered by your clinic, and 2) decide whether or not you will choose to take the vaccine.

Itasca residents with questions or concerns, especially those beyond vaccine availability, 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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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 Jan. 21.

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).

PHOTOS FOLLOW

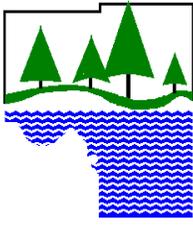


PHOTO CAPTION (above): Dr. Linus Levon, family practice physician at Essentia Health Deer River, receives the COVID vaccine from Jamie Peterson, RN. The clinic is preparing space for increased vaccinations of community members as supplies to the area grow in coming weeks.

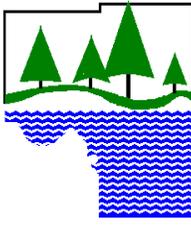


PHOTO CAPTION (above): Dr. Phil Imholte, Family Medicine physician at Grand Itasca, receives his second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Two-thirds of Grand Itasca's 582 staff receiving vaccinations have now received their second doses.