



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

POSITIVE SIGNS FOR ITASCA COUNTY

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Feb. 4, 2021**) – Following months of high levels of COVID-19, Itasca County now is seeing increasing vaccination, lower infection rates, most schools able to host students in-person, continuing sports seasons and collaboration among agencies and health care providers.

As of Feb. 4, Itasca County saw 35 residents newly diagnosed with COVID-19 over the past seven days and 69 over the past two weeks. The county's 14-day case average per 10,000 residents was 15.7 as of Feb. 1, similar to the levels of infection seen here since early January.

"There's a lot to be hopeful about in our area, possible because of sacrifices by families, individuals and hard-working front-line workers," said Kelly Chandler, division manager, Itasca County Public Health. "Still, we have more than 30 neighbors sick with COVID and in isolation and the virus still circulating. It's up to us to stay strong, keep our forward motion and not to waste the efforts so many have made to keep our neighbors safe.

"Please continue to wear masks, avoid gatherings and keep six feet of distance. We can see the finish line, but we're not there yet."

Ten percent (4,502) of Itasca residents have received at least a first dose of COVID vaccine, according to Minnesota Department of Health. Health care providers, staff and residents of long-term care facilities and a good portion of schools staff have been vaccinated. In addition, local health care providers have begun offering vaccines to elders.

"Every Itasca resident who would like to be vaccinated will have access to one," said Chandler. "It's just going to take a bit. The reality is, supplies still are uncertain and information can be confusing. Hang in there. Local agencies and providers are ready to assist as more and more supplies are available."

As of Feb. 4, local health care facilities have the following guidance:



Essentia Deer River

At Essentia Health, vaccinations are being offered on a limited basis for high-risk health care workers, residents of long-term-care facilities and those who are 65-plus. Essentia Health patients who are 65-plus are being randomly selected for vaccinations. We are notifying them through their MyChart account and via a telephone call. If a patient does not have MyChart — our online patient portal — they are notified by phone call. We also are finalizing a plan to offer a self-attestation, along with registration for MyChart to non-Essentia patients, which will include an attestation to collect employment, risk factors and interest in receiving the vaccine. To register for MyChart, visit EssentiaHealth.org and click on the “MyChart” button in the upper right-hand corner; then click “sign up.”

While we can’t wait to begin administering the vaccine broadly within the communities we serve, supplies currently are limited. We’ll continue to follow guidelines from our state departments of health, which determine vaccination priority. Please know that Essentia Health will contact you when it’s your turn.

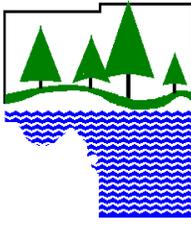
Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital

Grand Itasca is working hard to be able to vaccinate as many patients as quickly and efficiently as possible. At this time, patients 75 years of age and older are able to schedule an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccination at Grand Itasca. Appointments are being scheduled one week at a time. Every Monday at 9:00 a.m., the available appointments for that week are opened for scheduling. The preferred and quickest method to schedule a vaccine appointment is via MyChart, though patients are also able to call the appointment line at 218-326-7344 to schedule. The scheduling process and our vaccination criteria are subject to change, but we are committed to sharing updates in as many ways as possible, including on our website and Facebook page. For patients under the age of 75, the best thing you can do right now is to ensure you have a MyChart account and that your contact information is current and your communication preferences are updated.

Bigfork Valley

Bigfork Valley continues to collaborate with area healthcare systems, Itasca County Public Health, and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to help deliver the COVID-19 vaccination to as many individuals as possible. While Bigfork Valley does not currently have any appointments available for the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, we have developed a waitlist of interested patients and will contact them as we receive allocations.

We will continue to update our website and social media as vaccinations become available to our pharmacy for distribution and ask for your patience as we receive guidance from our state health department regarding our vaccine allotment and priority structures. If you do not have a primary healthcare provider, we encourage you to establish care and urge patients to receive the vaccination as it becomes available.



Scenic Rivers Health Services

In Bigfork, Scenic Rivers clinic is currently receiving Moderna vaccine in a limited amount to assist with vaccination of patients age 65 and older. Distribution of this vaccine to Scenic Rivers is in collaboration with Minnesota Department of Health with direction to follow the guidelines of vaccinating patients 65 and older only. Please follow postings on our website at www.scenicrivershealthservices.org for ongoing updates of vaccine supply. Appointments are required and walk-ins will not be accepted. Scenic Rivers will continue to assist the public as vaccine is available in an effort to fight this pandemic.

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

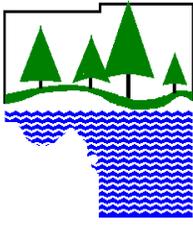
Itasca residents with questions or concerns may leave them at the Itasca County COVID message line, with calls returned 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. The Itasca COVID line number is 218-327-6784. Current local data and information also can be found at the county's website here: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>

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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 Feb. 18.

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).



Judith Peterson (above) at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, Grand Rapids



Ray Johnson (above) at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital