



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ITASCA COUNTY MARKS ONE YEAR OF COVID

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **March 5, 2021**) – Minnesota’s first case of COVID-19 was identified on March 6, 2020. Since then, Itasca County has seen 3,141 cases, 46 deaths, 221 hospitalizations, 49 intensive care unit stays, and 9,297 first vaccinations.

“What a year,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “We did not know in March 2020 how COVID spread; now we know it is primarily airborne. We know that good hygiene, including hand washing, is important, but even more important is masking to prevent the droplets carrying the virus from spreading to others.

“A year ago, we did not know that you could spread COVID prior to showing symptoms. Now we know you can spread it two days prior to showing symptoms or even without showing symptoms at all.

“Some thought that Itasca County, which is more rural, could be immune to COVID. We are a mobile society and rural places are not immune at all.

“We have learned how important essential workers, health care, childcare, broadband, schools, food and small businesses are to our communities.

“Most importantly, we have learned how resilient our children, parents, families and neighbors are. We are so thankful and appreciative for our community members who have worked so hard to keep family, friends, coworkers and neighbors safe. You have worn your masks, foregone gatherings and holidays, supported our local businesses. On behalf of public health, we appreciate you all very much.

“We finally can see a finish line, but we are not there yet. Please stay strong, Itasca.”

Cases of COVID-19 remain elevated in Itasca County, although precautions such as mask-wearing and not gathering have the slowed the rate of spread. As of March 4, new cases of COVID-19 in Itasca County over the past seven days stood at 29, in contrast to 70 new cases the previous seven days.

Vaccines are flowing into Itasca County at higher levels. This week, unexpected deliveries of the new single-dose vaccine arrived at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital and local Thrifty White



pharmacies received 1,200 doses of the Pfizer vaccine. In Itasca County, the current priority group is those age 65 and over and any who were previously prioritized but missed.

Looking ahead, Itasca County Public Health is adding a clinic on Friday, March 12, offering first doses for those prioritized as part of Phase 1a, plus paid or unpaid caregivers, childcare providers, early childhood through Grade 12 educators, and those 65 and older. The online link to register is here: <https://prepmo.health.state.mn.us//reg/5931600762>.

For seniors who have difficulty accessing online registrations on their own, ElderCircle is available to assist.

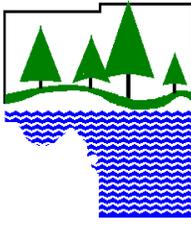
In addition to Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, Thrifty White Pharmacies and Itasca County Public Health, vaccines are available in the area, depending on supplies, at Essentia Health Deer River, Bigfork Valley, Scenic Rivers, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Walmart Pharmacy.

“There is much to be hopeful for, especially as weather improves and we increasingly are able to be outside,” said Chandler. “Still, this is a time to keep our guards up, do what we know works to protect each other. For example, if you are considering gathering, be creative and careful. The planning and thinking around this year’s annual Children’s Fair, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Pow-Wows and Second Harvest Food Bank Chef’s Gala fundraiser are good examples.”

Last year, the annual Children’s Fair had to be cancelled. Highly popular, community organizations and businesses come together for the fair to provide area families a free, fun-filled day of educational activities and information. According to Melanie DeBay, Itasca Area Community Educator, this year's 2021 Children's Fair will be a drive-through event on April 24, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the grounds of Grand Rapids High School. Details may be found at www.getlearning.org

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe leaders have had to make many tough calls when it came to keeping its communities safe over the past year. For example, more than 10,000 people normally attend the Band’s Pow Wows, but not in 2020. Tribal leaders are watching COVID numbers and vaccination rates carefully before making firm plans for 2021. In the meantime, Leech Lake Pow Wow Coordinator Branden Bowstrings says creative planning is underway to make the gatherings as safe as possible as soon as they are possible, such as limiting crowding, planning for bagged meals and purchasing hand-sanitizing stations. The Band’s Pow Wow schedule may be followed at <https://www.llojibwe.org/powwow/powwow.html>.

Second Harvest North Central Food Bank raises tens of thousands of dollars each year for its critical work to feed area families. As Trisha Zimmerman, the organization’s development director, thought about trying to host its annual fundraiser during COVID, she knew it somehow still needed to happen. In partnership with the Reif Center and other community organizations, Second Harvest put on a virtual Chef’s Gala that still raised \$65,000. Trisha says many lessons were learned that she is willing to share, including that it is possible to find success despite a pandemic if you are creative and careful. The work of Second Harvest and the story of the Chef’s Gala is at www.secondharvestncfb.com



The most recent “Stay Safe” guidelines may be found at the Minnesota Department of Health website: <https://mn.gov/covid19/stay-safe/stay-safe-plan/>

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 18.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

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