



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOUR MORE ITASCA COUNTY DEATHS ATTRIBUTED TO COVID

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Dec. 29, 2020**) – New cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in Itasca County have dropped in recent weeks, although they still are at a level considered uncontrolled.

Fifty new cases were diagnosed among Itasca County residents over the past seven days and 182 over the previous 14, as of Dec. 28. When measured per 10,000 Itasca residents, the 14-day average is 40.6, down from a high of 129 in November.

The county has seen four additional deaths, two females in their 90s, one female in her 80s and one male in his 80s. A total of 37 Itasca area residents have died due to COVID-19. Seventy-eight Itasca County residents are currently hospitalized, some who have been for weeks.

In order to minimize virus spread following the holidays, Itasca County Public Health and Minnesota National Guard are offering free COVID-19 saliva testing on Jan. 6, 7 and 8, from noon to 6:00 p.m. at Grand Rapids High School. Anyone can get tested, whether or not you've been exposed or have symptoms.

Appointments for testing may be made online at the following link:
<https://mncovidtestingappt.as.me/schedule.php?location=Grand+Rapids+High+School>. For those not able to sign up online or who need an interpreter, call 1-800-800-5698.

“It’s going to take a week or two to understand the impact of the holidays on our spread of COVID in Itasca County,” said Kelly Chandler, division manager, Itasca County Public Health. “Since early December, our residents have driven the rate of spread down through mask-wearing, keeping physical distance and sacrificing in many ways. It saved lives and makes us more resilient as we enter the worst of this pandemic. As we get back to work and school, resume sports and work our way toward vaccinations, we’ve got to be strong. The healthier we can stay in the next several weeks, the faster our county is going to recover.”

Vaccinations continue in Itasca County according to guidance from Minnesota Department of Health. Phases already underway include hospital staff, followed by EMS responders, law enforcement and fire and public health staff beginning this week. Skilled nursing facilities (both staff and residents) also will begin in the next week. The full process is expected to take at least two months, with different populations notified directly and through public announcements as their turns come.



“We thank our residents for their patience,” said Chandler. “Our planning is working. We have received the supplies we were expecting and remain focused on preventing spread of COVID to vulnerable populations. The vaccine has brought new energy to our local public health community and we are working through phases to reach all age groups, regardless of vulnerability, as quickly as possible. But this is going to take a few months.”

Itasca County’s largest health care facility, Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital alone has vaccinated nearly 400 staff members. “We plan to have given both doses of the vaccination to all of our staff by the end of the January,” said Tyler Waller, PharmD, director of pharmacy for Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital. “While this is very encouraging and promising, we understand it opens up a lot of questions about vaccinations for the rest of the community. We are anxiously awaiting details on when and how those vaccines will be distributed. As soon as we know those details, we’ll make sure to inform the community as soon as possible.”

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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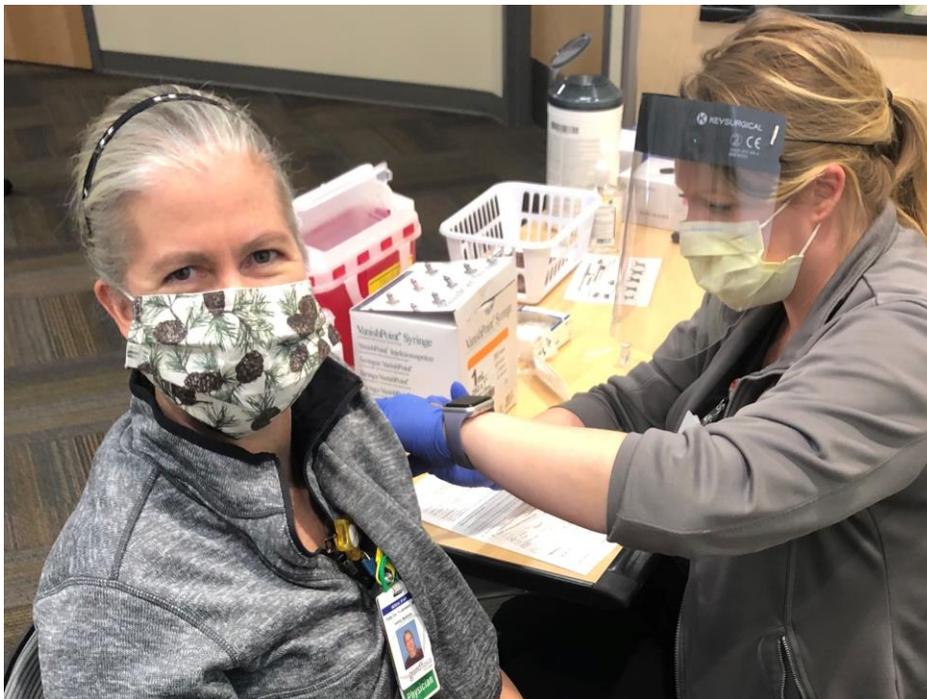
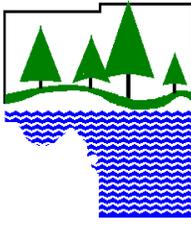


PHOTO CAPTION (above): Nurse Haley Kallinen administers the Pfizer vaccine to Dr. Patty Carlin-Janssen, who is among nearly 400 Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital staff who have received



COVID vaccinations so far. Itasca County is prepared to move through all vaccination phases over the next two months.



PHOTO CAPTION: Vaccinations of health care staff continue throughout Itasca County. Vanessa Nei, Bigfork Valley Hospital Pharmacy Technician said she chose to vaccinate, “Because we need to defeat this virus, and I feel strongly about protecting those around me.”

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. 7 (there will be no briefing on Dec. 31). Contact anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us for more information.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

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