



**Quad Cities COVID-19 Coalition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 17, 2020**

Current COVID-19 case count

Scott County – Total of 8,886
Total deaths in Scott County: 61

Rock Island County – 145 new cases since Monday; total of 7,023
Currently in hospital in Rock Island County: 72, a record high
Total deaths in Rock Island County: 117

Today's call

A video recording of today's media briefing can be found at
<https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/covid19/news>

New public health measures in Iowa

Remarks from Edward Rivers, director, Scott County Health Department

We have seen an explosion of cases over the last week or so that has both our departments quite concerned. In Scott County, case counts have been averaging almost 300 per day, with some days being over 400 cases. By comparison, there were only 321 cases in the entire month of June.

The Scott County 14-day positivity rate above 25% and Rock Island County 7-day positivity rate over 15% just speak to the high level of spread we are seeing.

Our medical facilities are sounding the alarm. They're reporting that it has been necessary to open new wards for the influx of COVID patients. At the same time, hospital staff have been sidelined by illness and quarantine. There is concern that soon they won't be able to accommodate patients in need.

Yesterday, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced enhanced public health measures to help address the explosion of cases and health care system stress we are experiencing across the state.

- Masks are required in indoor spaces open to the public
- Social, community, business, and leisure gatherings are limited to 15 people indoors and 30 people outdoors (this includes funeral and wedding receptions as well as family gatherings)

- Sporting and recreational events outside of high school, college, or professional sports are currently prohibited
- Bars and Restaurants must close by 10:00pm; masks are required when not seated, and social distancing and group sizes of 8 must be adhered to – these measures mirror the requirements for other establishments such as bowling alleys and pool halls
- Group fitness activities are prohibited
- Lastly, nonessential and elective surgeries must be reduced at least 50% in order to accommodate COVID and other health care intensive illnesses

We applaud these measures as a good start to helping reduce the spread that is causing our recent tsunami of cases. We know that people are spreading the virus to family members and close friends, and our investigators are told of gatherings without social distancing and masking. The numbers we are currently seeing what we would expect to see when people aren't taking the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the virus.

This surge of cases is also dramatically impacting public health's ability to investigate cases in a beneficial timeframe. In Scott County, individuals testing positive for COVID-19 can expect to receive a phone call from either the Iowa Department of Public Health or our department. We had to make the difficult decision to transition primary responsibility for contact tracing and case interviews to the Iowa Department of Public Health. IDPH is currently providing contact tracing services for more than half of Iowa counties and, beginning this week, is doing the same for Scott County.

IDPH has access to greater resources to ramp up contact tracing services as continue to soar higher each week. While we will continue to be involved in some level of contact tracing in Scott County, this transition will allow our department the ability to focus on our role in supporting our school districts, long-term care facilities, other types of COVID-19 response, as well as upcoming vaccination planning.

Know that individuals testing positive for COVID-19 in Scott County will still be contacted to be interviewed and provided guidance to reducing spreading of the virus. These calls will just primarily come one of our two departments.

Before I continue, I am going to give Nita a moment to update you all on contact tracing in Rock Island County.

Nita Ludwig, administrator, Rock Island County Health Department

In Rock Island County, the health department will continue to be the entity conducting contact tracing for Rock Island County residents. However, you can only imagine what this increase of 200-plus cases on some days is impacting our ability to interview positive cases and identify contacts in a timely manner. We are doing our best in our department and all hands are on deck. But it's isn't enough for where we are now at.

Back to Edward Rivers, director, Scott County Health Department

With that in mind, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the dedicated health department staff of both counties. They have worked tirelessly, 7 days a week, since early April, to help protect our community. But, they are weary. They are affected by intense emotions that come with talking to people who are ill and scared, family members of those who are hospitalized, and those of the 51 members of our community who we have lost. They went into the career of public health to protect population health, but they have never experienced a pandemic like this.

What concerns us most right now is holiday gatherings. People sitting around a table, elbow to elbow, passing plates and bowls. Talking, laughing, and hugging when they arrive and depart. We worry that these gatherings will mean further spread of COVID-19, especially to more vulnerable groups like the elderly and people with underlying conditions.

In our current COVID-19 world, more cases eventually leads to more hospitalizations, more stress on our hospital resources, and unfortunately, more deaths. We can't afford any of these things.

We would like to share our guidance for the upcoming holidays. It won't be warm and fuzzy and you're probably not going to like it, but we will continue to push for what we know will protect our community.

Holiday gatherings must be different this year

Remarks from Nita Ludwig, administrator of the Rock Island County Health Department

In this dangerous point in the pandemic, we are asking you to spend Thanksgiving and the upcoming holidays with the family members in your household. Adding individuals from different households as well as members of vulnerable groups to holiday celebrations seriously increases the risk of spreading the virus around the table.

Travel

Travel increases your chances of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. We encourage you to avoid travel as much as possible, especially during this busy travel season.

If you do travel, follow these tips:

- Plan ahead for things such as spread in your destination location, how to get to/from the airport, hotel check-in practices, and car travel route
- Avoid gathering in crowded areas such as airport terminals and hotel lounges
- Wear your mask when on an airplane, in common areas, and when in restaurants/rest areas

Hosting holiday events

If you make the decision to **host** holiday gatherings, keep them small. The Quad Cities own Dr. Louis Katz believes groups larger than 10 significantly increases the risk of spreading the virus.

- Remind guests to stay home if they are sick or if they have been exposed to anyone with COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing. People from the same household can be in groups together and do not need to be 6 feet apart – just 6 feet away from other families.
- Skip hugs – require masks and provide them for those who forget
- If serving food, have one person serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.
- When possible, use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, and condiments, so that multiple people are not handling the items.
- Consider using disposable plates, silverware, napkins, etc. to reduce the need to handle and clean them.

Attending a gathering

If you make the decision to attend a gathering, do so carefully.

- Stay home if: you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or show symptoms; you are waiting for COVID-19 test results; and you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Bring supplies to help you and others stay healthy — such as a mask and hand sanitizer
- Sit with those individuals from your household
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer immediately before eating food or after touching any common surfaces like hand railings, door handles, and toilets.

The holidays are going to look different this year. As they should – we are in an active pandemic. Be smart during this time of year — don't let a 10-plus day isolation and/or a 14-plus day quarantine creep up and sideline you.

And as Ed said earlier, I also acknowledge and thank managers and staff at the Rock Island County Health Department for their hard work under these difficult conditions. We are tired — emotionally, intellectually and physically. All of us joined the public health workforce to make a difference in our community. While COVID has changed every aspect of our work and home lives, health department staff still are protecting all of the public's health. I am proud of our staff who continue to:

- Serve our WIC clients
- Help families get the resources they need as they navigate these dark days

- Inspect restaurants, private water supplies, and septic systems so that we don't have foodborne outbreaks or unsafe drinking water on top of everything else
- Educate about health and improve health policies
- Give flu shots at clinics all over the county and still by appointment at the health department
- Administer other vaccines to prevent disease by appointment AND
- Investigate other infectious diseases outbreaks

We need your help. If you have the virus, you must stay home for 10 days after symptoms start, even if someone from the health department has yet to tell you this. If you have been told by anyone that you are a close contact to a sick person, you must stay home for 14 days from the most recent contact you had had with that person. Please don't go out in public and spread the virus to others. Please help us.

More information: Including new mitigations in Illinois and Iowa

- Just before the QC COVID-19 Coalition briefing, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker announced that all of the state will enter Tier 3 mitigation on Friday, Nov. 20. A summary of mitigations can be found at <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/restore-illinois-mitigation-plan>
- Iowa mitigations:
<https://governor.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Summary%20of%20Enhanced%20Public%20Health%20Measures%20final.pdf>
- <https://www.scottcountyiowa.gov/health/post/do-masks-prevent-covid-19>
- <https://togetherqc.com/2020/10/mask-mandate-local-initiative/>
- www.TogetherQC.com
- coronavirus.iowa.gov
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=2>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/countymetrics?county=Rock%20Island>
- <https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/facilities/Pages/Covid19Response.aspx>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/long-term-care-facility-outbreaks-covid-19>

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