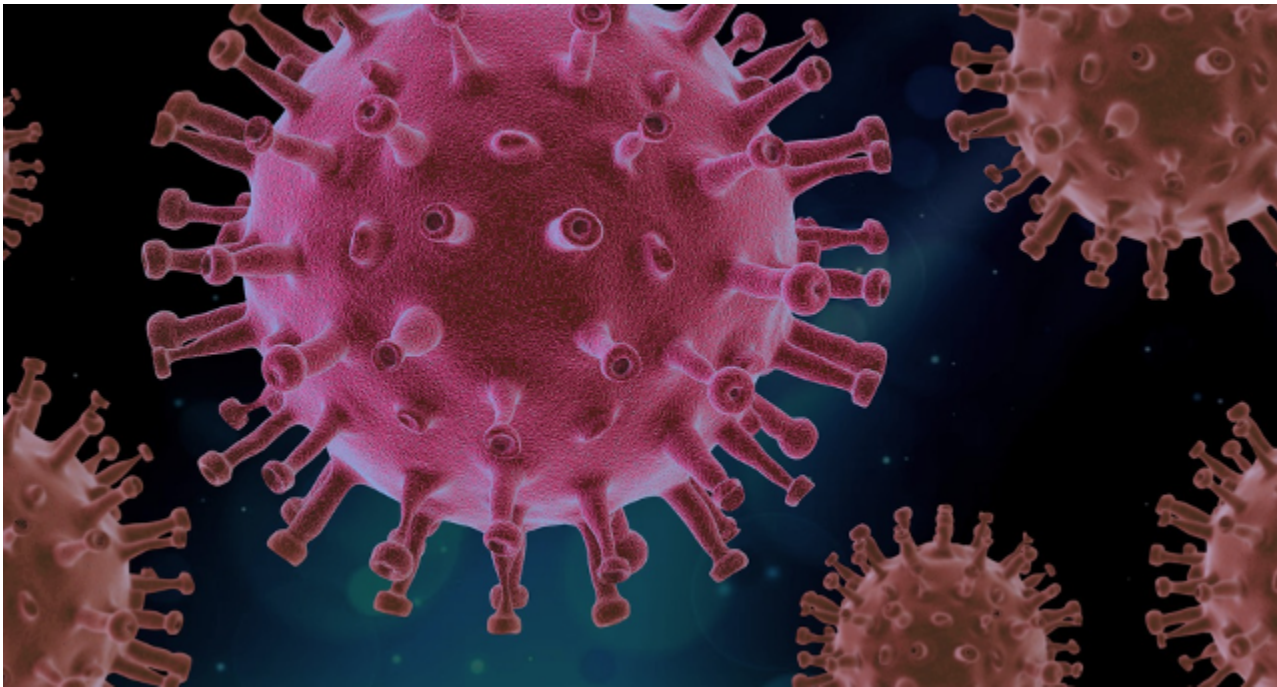


IDPH Reports 74 Illinois Counties Are At Elevated Community Level For COVID-19

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CHICAGO – COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses are continuing to rise across Illinois following the Thanksgiving holiday, with 74 counties in Illinois rated at an elevated level for COVID-19 by the CDC. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) said that the anticipated post-holiday surge is a reminder for the public to take action to protect themselves and their loved ones during the remainder of the holiday season. This is especially important when it comes to members of the family who are vulnerable to severe outcomes.

IDPH is emphasizing these safety reminders as the CDC reported 29 Illinois counties at a [High Community Level for COVID-19](#), up from 12 a week ago; while 45 counties are

a Medium Level, compared to 51 last week. IDPH is reporting 21,404 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Illinois since December 2, and 56 deaths.

“Illinois is experiencing a significant rise in communities at elevated risk levels for COVID-19, including 29 counties at a high risk,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “These elevated COVID-19 community levels, along with rising flu levels, are leading to a surge of respiratory infections and increased hospitalizations. I recommend all Illinoisians - and especially those most vulnerable including young children and individuals over 65 - take all preventative steps to protect themselves, their families and friends.

“Preventative measures include COVID-19 testing, especially if visiting someone at risk for severe disease; enhanced ventilation; good hand hygiene; staying home and seeking treatment if sick; and getting up to date with the COVID-19 bivalent booster and the flu shot,” Dr. Vohra said. “A high-quality mask or respirator is also recommended and will protect you from COVID-19, the flu and other respiratory viruses. Our hope is for Illinoisians across our state to have a happy and healthy holiday season.”

Dr. Vohra stressed that those who test positive for COVID-19 should immediately contact their healthcare provider to discuss whether they need treatment with one of the effective antiviral medications, Paxlovid, Lagverio and Remdesivir. All of these have been found to work against the current strains of the virus.

Access to tests and treatments can be found at the following [test to treat site](#) or by contacting your provider for [treatment options](#), within 5 days of feeling ill.

IDPH is helping Illinoisans prepare for the fall and winter surge of COVID-19 cases by offering 1 million free COVID-19 rapid antigen tests to residents in economically disadvantaged zip codes through a partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation’s public charity, RF Catalytic Capital and its Project ACT (Access COVID Tests) program.

Through Project ACT, IDPH will be distributing one million at-home antigen tests to 200,000 Illinois families in zip codes outside the City of Chicago that are rated high on a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). Households can find out if they are in an eligible zip code and request one package of five tests on a first-come-first-serve basis at the [Project ACT website](#). The tests will be delivered to the home address.

Free or low cost COVID-19 testing locations are also available throughout the state, including in Chicago, and can be found on the IDPH website’s [testing locator page](#).

The CDC authorized two new bivalent booster vaccines on September 1 that include an mRNA component of the original strain to provide an immune response that is broadly

protective against COVID-19 and an added mRNA component in common between the omicron variant BA.4 and BA.5 lineages to provide better protection against COVID-19 caused by the omicron variant.

Initially, the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, was authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 18 years of age and older and the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, was authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 12 years of age and older. On October 12, the CDC authorized the updated COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech for children ages 5 through 11 years, and from Moderna for children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years.

The updated boosters are available at pharmacies, hospitals, and other healthcare providers. The best way to locate a vaccine provider near you is to visit www.vaccines.gov and search for bivalent booster availability.

Currently, IDPH is reporting a total of 3,906,801 cases, including 35,550 deaths, in 102 counties in Illinois since the beginning of the pandemic.

As of last night, 1,582 individuals in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 188 patients were in the ICU and 69 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators. The preliminary seven-day statewide case rate is 168 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Illinoisans.

The CDC recommends the following measures for people in areas that are rated at **High Community Level** for COVID-19 transmission:

- Wear a well-fitting mask indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status (including in K-12 schools and other indoor community settings)
- If you are immunocompromised or [high risk](#) for severe disease
 - o Wear a [mask or respirator](#) that provides you with greater protection
 - o Consider avoiding non-essential indoor activities in public where you could be exposed
 - o Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to take other precautions
 - o Have a plan for rapid testing if needed (e.g., having home tests or access to testing)
 - o IF YOU TEST POSITIVE: Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you are a candidate for treatments like oral antivirals, and monoclonal antibodies

- If you have household or social contact with someone at [high risk](#) for severe disease
 - o consider self-testing to detect infection before contact
 - o consider wearing a mask when indoors with them
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and boosters
- Maintain improved ventilation throughout indoor spaces when possible
- Follow CDC recommendations for isolation and quarantine, including getting tested if you are exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19

In counties at the **Medium Community Level**, persons who are elderly or immunocompromised (at risk of severe outcomes) are advised to wear a mask in indoor public places. They should also get up to date on COVID-19 vaccines or get their bivalent booster, if eligible.

IDPH has been supporting pharmacies and healthcare providers in efforts to increase their inventories of the various FDA-authorized treatments. There are [over 1,200 treatment locations](#) in Illinois - including all the major retail pharmacies. More than 96.7% of the state's population is within a 10-mile radius of one of these locations.

A total of 25,491,566 vaccines have been administered in Illinois. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 16,008 doses, including the bivalent booster and first doses. Since December 2, 112,053 vaccine doses were reported administered in Illinois. More than 2 million people in Illinois have received the new bivalent booster dose since it was authorized. Of Illinois' total population, more than 78% have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, more than 70% have completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccines, and of the eligible population, more than 16% have received the bivalent booster dose, according to [data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Data indicates that the risk of hospitalization and severe outcomes from COVID-19 is much higher for unvaccinated people than for those who are up to date on their vaccinations. All data are provisional and are subject to change. Additional information and COVID-19 data can be found at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19.html>.

Vaccination is the key to ending this pandemic. To find a COVID-19 vaccination location near you, go to www.vaccines.gov. The federal government has established a

new website that provides an all-purpose toolkit with information on how to obtain masks, treatment, vaccines and testing resources for all areas of the country at:

<https://www.covid.gov/>.