

IDPH Reports 88 Illinois Counties are at an Elevated Community Level for COVID-19

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CHICAGO – With families across Illinois and the nation gathering to celebrate the holiday season this weekend and COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses circulating at concerning levels, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding the public to celebrate the holidays safely and take action to protect their most vulnerable loved ones, including the elderly and the very young. IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra is urging those who are feeling ill to take a COVID-19 test and to stay home if they test positive to avoid spreading the virus to friends and family, especially those vulnerable to serious outcomes.

IDPH also announced today that as of the end this year, it will follow the lead of the CDC and shift from daily reporting of new COVID-19 cases and deaths to a weekly cadence for reporting that data. Daily case and death data will no longer be reported as of January 1, 2023. Following that date, IDPH will report weekly data on Wednesday of each week for the previous week ending Sunday. IDPH will continue to report [ICU bed availability and hospital admission data](#) on a daily basis.

The CDC [announced it was making the shift](#) from daily to weekly reporting of case and death data in October. IDPH officials believe that weekly reporting will provide the public with a more accurate picture of COVID-19 trends across the state over time by tracking cases and deaths by the week they arise, rather than the date they are reported, which may be days or weeks later.

According to the CDC, 88 counties in Illinois rated at an elevated level for COVID-19 by the CDC, up from 86 a week ago. Of those, the CDC reported 33 Illinois counties at a [High Community Level for COVID-19](#), down from 43 a week ago; while 55 counties are at Medium Level, compared to 43 last week. IDPH is reporting 23,793 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Illinois since December 16, and 82 deaths.

“Illinois continues to see most of its communities at elevated risk levels for COVID-19, including 33 counties that are currently at high risk,” Director Vohra said. “Although we are seeing some improvement in the number of high risk communities compared to last week, I encourage Illinoisians to continue to use preventative measures as we enter the holiday weekend and enjoy our holiday gatherings. We are still seeing COVID-19 community levels, along with flu and other respiratory illnesses rise in many counties. Our goal is to limit hospitalizations, preserve hospital beds, and protect those most vulnerable to serious health outcomes, especially those over 65 and very young children.

“These preventative measures start with being up-to-date with the COVID-19 bivalent booster and getting your flu shot,” Director Vohra continued. “Other important protective steps include COVID-19 testing, especially if visiting someone at risk for severe disease; enhanced ventilation at gatherings; and good hand hygiene. And if you are sick, stay home and consult with your provider about whether you need one of the effective treatments that are available. 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 weekend.”

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 Illinois residents in all zip codes outside the City of Chicago 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 is distributing up to one million at-home antigen tests to 200,000 Illinois households. You can request one package of five tests on a first-come-first-serve basis at the [Request Free Tests page](#) on the IDPH 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.

On December 9, the CDC expanded its authorization for bivalent boosters to include children aged 6 months to 5 years. Children ages 6 months through 5 years who previously completed a Moderna primary series can now receive a Moderna bivalent booster 2 months after their final primary series dose. Children ages 6 months through 4 years who are completing a Pfizer primary series will receive a Pfizer bivalent vaccine as their third primary dose.

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 3,953,928 cases, including 35,714 deaths, in 102 counties in Illinois since the beginning of the pandemic.

As of last night, 1,814 individuals in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 184 patients were in the ICU and 117 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators. The preliminary seven-day statewide case rate is 187 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 25,674,890 vaccines have been administered in Illinois. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 13,188 doses, including the bivalent booster and first doses. Since December 16, 92,315 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, 71% have completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccines, and of the eligible population, more than 18% 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/>.