



**Quad Cities COVID-19 Coalition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 8, 2021**

Recording of today's call

A video recording can be found at <https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/covid19/news>

Cases rising quickly

Dr. Louis Katz did not speak from prepared remarks, but he showed the Scott County epidemic curve. Rock Island County's curve is similar.

13 of 16 Genesis COVID patients are on a ventilator

Remarks from Dr. Christopher Crome, vice president of medical affairs, Genesis Health System

The increase in COVID cases is likely due to a number of factors, such as a lack of masking and physical distancing indoors, large indoor gatherings, and current low vaccination rates on the community. We are now almost two weeks post-Thanksgiving, and we are beginning to see people who were exposed during gatherings requiring hospitalization.

The current increase in COVID patients has had a significant impact on our census at all of our hospital campuses. In our ICU on Tuesday, for example we had 16 patients (total ICU census is 20) who have been diagnosed with COVID. Of the 16 patients being treated for COVID, 13 are on a ventilator. The increasing numbers of COVID patients requiring hospitalization results in strain on local healthcare resources to care for all patients who require care. The majority of our hospitalized patients with COVID continue to be unvaccinated. On Tuesday, 15 out of the 16 COVID patients were not vaccinated.

The best advice is to prevent getting infected:

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated
- If you are vaccinated, get a booster
- Wear a mask in public indoor spaces
- Wash/sanitize your hands often
- Practice physical distancing (at least 3ft between you and another person) when you can
- Stay home if you are ill and follow-up with your primary care provider as needed

Regarding the Omicron strain: The Iowa Department of Public Health reported Monday that the predominate strain in Iowa is Delta. The State Hygienic Lab not identified the Omicron strain as of Dec. 7. They are able to do the sequencing and have has started testing samples submitted from labs around the state.

UnityPoint seeing sharp rise in COVID patients, ICUs stretched

Remarks from Dr. Toyosi Olutade, chief medical officer at UnityPoint Health-Quad Cities

How do hospitalizations today compare to other high rates over time?

- Last year in November hit a high of 116 hospitalized patients. Hospitalizations remained high (above 50) through January.
- We've been above 50 patients most days since August.
- Seen a sharp increase in the past two weeks.

What do we attribute the rise?

- Colder weather moving people indoors for gatherings.
- Slow vaccination rate.
- Adults needing boosters.
- Relaxed masking.

What's different with this surge versus others?

- We have the necessary PPE and supplies.
- Bed space and staffing are very strained.
- People who need help may need to travel long distances out of the area to receive care.
- Vaccine is readily available and expanded availability for a younger population.
- Omicron variant's impact largely unknown.

How is this now impacting elective surgeries? ICU space? Hospital staffing?

- We continually evaluate our capacity (beds, staffing and supplies) and adjust our operations accordingly.
- The decision to postpone elective surgeries is currently a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the provider based on their knowledge of a patient's health.
- ICU capacity remains stretched.
- We are redeploying staff in leadership roles and from our clinics to help in the hospital.
- We are exploring creative solutions to ensure those who need our help receive it without delay.

What can you expect when you're seeking care?

- Seeing extended wait times in our walk-in clinics and Emergency Departments.
- Please be kind to our health care staff.

Overwhelming majority of COVID-19 cases not fully vaccinated

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

Physicians and public health officials across the country have stressed that the overwhelming majority of people who are seriously ill or who have died from COVID-19 have not been

vaccinated. Dr. Fauci has called this stage a “Pandemic of the Unvaccinated.” I decided to look at recent numbers to prove that the same is true in Rock Island County. Not surprisingly, it is.

Looking up the vaccination status of every patient is time-consuming — it took four hours — and not something we can do often. Of 219 recent positive cases from this past weekend:

- 181 were not vaccinated
- 3 were partially vaccinated, which means they had 1 dose of the 2-dose series
- 35 were vaccinated, but only 2 had a booster shot that unfortunately is needed because of the high levels of virus circulating in most regions of the country.

The same is true for deaths. Rock Island County has 17 total deaths from Nov. 1 to Dec. 6. Not surprisingly, most were not fully vaccinated:

- 11 were not vaccinated. That’s 64.7 %
- 2 were partially vaccinated
- 4 were vaccinated, but they had serious underlying health conditions

This little study proves what we and other public health and healthcare leaders have been saying for months – and for hundreds of years, really. Vaccines work.

Please get vaccinated as soon as possible. Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find your shot. RICHD offers walk-in vaccines on Tuesdays (Moderna and Johnson & Johnson) and Fridays (Pfizer). The hours for both days are 9 a.m. to noon and 1-4 p.m. Boosters or third doses for immunocompromised people are available on the same day as first and second doses. We offer vaccines for children ages 5-11 by appointment on Fridays. Pediatric clinics are full until Dec. 17. The link for the Dec. 17 clinic will be posted at 10 a.m. Dec. 15 on the health department’s Facebook page. Many of our healthcare and pharmacy partners also are offering vaccines for children. You also can find those on [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

While we are in this high wave of virus transmission, we also must continue masking and social distancing. A mandate from Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker requires that everyone 2 and older wear a mask in public indoor spaces, regardless of vaccination status. The CDC recommends that everyone age 2 and older wear a mask in counties of high or substantial transmission, which includes almost every county in the country. We all look forward to the day when vaccination rates are high enough that we don’t have to wear masks in public and when around unvaccinated people. This day will come.

And this is good public health advice for COVID-19 and any respiratory disease, especially during cold and flu season:

- Stay home when you are sick
- Wash your hands frequently

Changing pandemic landscape requires changing behavior

Remarks from Amy Thoreson, director, Scott County Health Department

As you've heard from our health system partners, we are at the most challenging time in this pandemic in the last year, since the surge that took place last November. Fatigued isn't a strong enough word for the sentiment in our community right now. Nearly two years of vigilance, being told what to do, and having to change your activities is exhausting.

We know that we have to live with this virus, which isn't going anywhere. And we can do that – as a community. But living with this virus doesn't mean doing nothing. To put it into perspective, we live with the dramatic changes of weather in Iowa – but we make decisions and take varied actions as necessary depending on the weather. The weather has changed and now it's cold. I change my actions by wearing a winter coat, gloves, and hat if needed. We are not new to this concept of having to change our actions based on the circumstances before us.

The landscape of the pandemic has changed. Cases were lower in previous months and many of us had opportunities to take part in activities while not worrying as much about COVID risk, due to events being held outside and case counts being lower. The COVID situation has changed. The case counts are high, hospital systems are strapped, and there is no immediate end in sight. We need to change our actions as we do for everything else we encounter. For this, it means masking, even if you're fully vaccinated. It means getting tested when your symptoms feel just like a common cold or what you think it's your allergies. It means staying home if you suspect any of these symptoms. No meal or family event is worth learning later that you put your grandma, your niece, or your cousin battling cancer at risk due to now being COVID-positive.

This won't last forever. This pandemic will ebb and flow. We are in a tight spot at the moment and need to respond accordingly. Just know you're not alone and we're working to respond to this pandemic together.

More information

- www.TogetherQC.com
- coronavirus.iowa.gov
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccinedata?county=Rock%20Island>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=2>

###