



MEDIA RELEASE

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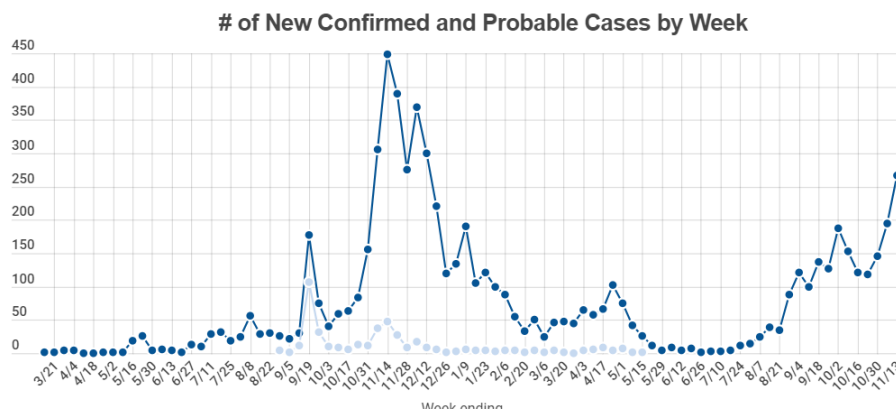
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Pierce County Public Health Alerts Residents of Critically High Cases and Extremely Limited Hospital Capacity, Urges Vaccinations and Additional Precautions

Pierce County Public Health is alerting residents of a critically high level of COVID-19 in the area. Pierce County identified 286 COVID-19 cases in the last seven days, which is over six times the case level that would put the county in the CDC “high” category of community spread. The positivity rate of COVID-19 tests in Pierce County over the last seven days is 19.12% (anything above 5% is considered high). Pierce County reported four COVID-19 deaths this week. “We had all hoped we’d never see a surge of this magnitude again. It’s now clear that COVID-19 is following a seasonal pattern and that we don’t have enough people vaccinated in Pierce County to create an immunity wall,” said AZ Snyder, Pierce County Health Officer. Nationally, 80% of people 12 and older have received at least their first dose of the vaccine. This compares to 74% statewide and 50% in Pierce County. Only 10% of the cases in Pierce County this year have been breakthrough infections among fully vaccinated individuals.



High case rates in Minnesota and western Wisconsin have resulted in extremely limited hospital bed availability. “The ability of small hospitals in the region to transfer patients who need to be in an intensive care unit (ICU) or on a ventilator to a hospital that can provide those services is extremely limited,” according to

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Alison Page, CEO at Western Wisconsin Health. "There are not enough ICU beds, and the situation could get worse over the next several weeks."

In an effort to protect staff, residents, and essential operations, Pierce County departments are taking extra steps to avoid spread in county facilities. Jason Matthys, Pierce County Administrative Coordinator, said "Pierce County continues to very closely monitor COVID-19 illness in our communities to help us make safe decisions with regard to our delivery of services and public meetings all while mitigating the spread of illness among staff and citizens alike. We have received requests to reopen County meetings for in-person public attendance and although we understand that in-person attendance is more desirable to provide comment on any matter of particular interest, given the continued spread of COVID-19 recently creating alarming illness rates coupled with low vaccination rates, it is simply not safe at the present time to allow large or small numbers of citizens to congregate, particularly with respect to the size limitations of available meeting rooms. The County will continue to offer alternate means of participation which include Zoom, Google Meeting and by phone. The public is more than welcome to participate by these alternate means and when our community can stabilize the strain of illness, reopening meetings for in-person public attendance will occur. Until that time, we ask for your continued patience and understanding."

With the holidays coming, it is important for families to consider taking the following steps to avoid spread during gatherings:

- Get vaccinated as soon as possible. If you are eligible for a booster, get one before your gathering.
- Remind everyone to stay home if they're having any symptoms of COVID-19 or are currently under isolation or quarantine.
- Consider getting tested before the gathering. Free testing is available in Ellsworth on Monday the 22nd from 9-11am at the Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services building.

Pierce County continues to urge those not yet vaccinated to talk to their doctor or make an appointment to receive the vaccine in Ellsworth (<https://piercecovid19vaccine.as.me/schedule.php>) or River Falls (<https://freemandrug.as.me/schedule.php>).

END



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