



Chaffee County Public Health

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Guest Column: Chaffee County Public Health Provides COVID Updates

Chaffee County, CO- The nights are getting cooler, the mornings darker, and there is a faint smell of crisp autumn leaves in the air. And, as fall starts to creep in on us, so does respiratory illness season. While Chaffee County Public Health (CCPH) and its healthcare partners have been paying close attention to trends and predictions related to influenza and RSV, we are also acutely aware that there has been a steady stream of COVID cases making its way throughout our county over the past few months. We anticipate these trends to continue, especially during this time of year when respiratory illnesses surge. The good news is that almost all cases of COVID, ranging from a mild cold to a serious “knock you down” situation, have not needed to be hospitalized. However, at any given time in our county, small outbreaks of COVID are occurring, and for some high-risk individuals, COVID (as well as influenza or RSV) may understandably bring about fear or anxiety.

Learning to live with a new virus in our lives has proven to be challenging over the past several years. However, for most people, especially for those who are low risk and/or up-to-date with COVID vaccination, getting COVID or finding out that someone you came into close contact with now has COVID, shouldn't cause any more anxiety or fear than other common illnesses, especially around this time of year when we start moving indoors. COVID is here to stay, and even though we are sure to see new variants and sub-variants that test the effectiveness of our prevention and intervention measures in the future, we have the tools in our toolbelt to fare well in health and wellness. CCPH has been fielding questions, concerns, and comments from the general public related to COVID, so I'd like to share some updates so that our community is well informed.

A new formula COVID vaccine booster is on the horizon, and we anticipate we will have it locally by the end of September. What we have heard so far is that it will provide protection against current variants and sub-variants. Rest assured, CCPH will let the public know when we have the booster in stock. It is anticipated that other healthcare providers will also be able to administer it. This booster is anticipated to be in high demand. COVID treatment, Paxlovid, continues to be available at Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center with a prescription.

While the emergency declaration has expired and therefore, COVID funding is no longer available to cover the cost of testing, CCPH does have free rapid tests on hand while supplies last. CCPH hopes to continue to offer free tests as long as possible, but the public should prepare itself for a day when tests must be purchased at a local retailer.

One area of our COVID response that remains is the 5-day isolation recommendations set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). While there is varying appetite to continue these isolation measures, CCPH asks that the public follow them for now. We are fully aware of the inconvenience and hardship this might cause for many, and we hope for a future in which COVID is treated like most illnesses based on acuity of symptoms. Most importantly, it is a good reminder to stay home and away from others as much as possible when sick and contagious. For more information on isolation and exposure precautions, visit the CDC's website.

Healthcare professionals are held to a different standard in their COVID response, so if a hospital or doctor's office is masking or is requiring patients to mask, we ask that the public comply with their request. If someone chooses to wear a mask, regardless of the reason, that is their choice, and we hope that they are met with respect and kindness.

As far as reporting positive rapid test results to CCPH, this is no longer recommended. The CDC and CDPHE are currently only using positive PCR tests as a valid data source, along with COVID hospitalizations and deaths. The best place to find this data is on the CDC and CDPHE COVID webpages. Locally, there has been one death due to COVID over the past several months.

Wow, our county has been through a lot together over the past several years, and CCPH continues to acknowledge our communities' strength, resilience, and patience as we navigate life with COVID in our lives whether we are at peace with it or not. My door is always open if you have ideas or thoughts on how we can address this public health issue as well as any other area of public health so that our county can thrive in health and wellness. I continue to be grateful for and honored to serve this very special valley.

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