



NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Reports 26 Illinois Counties at an Elevated Community Level for COVID-19

Public Health Officials Warn Cases of Strep Throat are Rising; Parents Urged to Have Young Kids with Symptoms Tested and Treated if Necessary

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced today that the CDC is reporting 26 counties in the state are at [Medium Community Level](#) for COVID-19 this week, compared to 14 a week ago. No counties were reported at High Level, compared to four the previous week.

IDPH has recorded a total of 4,083,292 cases and 36,431 deaths, in 102 counties in Illinois since the beginning of the pandemic. The department is reporting 10,320 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Illinois in the week ending March 5, and 45 deaths.

IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra warned that cases of group A strep throat leading to severe complications are on the rise in Illinois, with more cases reported in 2023 than in any of the past five years.

“As COVID-19 cases and community levels remain stable, I want to share my concern about the growing number of strep throat cases in Illinois that are leading to severe complications,” Director Vohra said. “These cases, known as invasive Group A strep, are the result of disease spreading from the throat to blood, muscle and lungs. I urge parents to contact their health providers when their children start showing early symptoms. These symptoms include sudden onset of sore throat, pain when swallowing and fever. Early detection is critical as strep can be diagnosed with a simple test and treated with antibiotics. If able, please make sure everyone in the house is up to date with flu and chickenpox vaccines. Having either the flu or chickenpox can increase your risk of contracting invasive Group A strep.”

Parents and others can get more information about Group A strep at this [CDC resource page](#).

IDPH is also urging the public to seek treatment for COVID-19 quickly if they test positive for COVID-19. Treatment is widely available and IDPH announced recently that SIU Medicine has made it easier to obtain care by offering a new [telehealth test to treat service](#) for COVID-19, in partnership with the department. The service is aimed at providing faster and easier access to treatment for Illinoisans who contract COVID-19. Those who test positive are encouraged to call 217-545-5100 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays

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and Sundays to schedule a telehealth appointment to determine if medical treatment is recommended. Appointments will be offered on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Additional options for obtaining 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 stay prepared for any future 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 [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.

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.

As of last night, 880 individuals in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 102 patients were in the ICU and 33 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators. The preliminary seven-day statewide case rate is 81 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Illinoisans.

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.



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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 26,057,999 vaccines have been administered in Illinois as of today. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 3,566 doses, including the bivalent booster and first doses. Since March 3, 24,961 vaccine doses were reported administered in Illinois. Of Illinois' total population, more than 79% have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, more than 71% have completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccines, and more than 19% 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/>.

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