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City-Cowley County
Health Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 17, 2021

County Wide COVID-19 Update

The City-Cowley County Health Department monitors the health of county residents. The following is an update to inform the community of the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Cowley County.

Respiratory illness in Cowley County remains widespread. There have been more than 200 new cases of COVID-19 reported during the first ten (10) days of December. Additionally, cases of influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) have also been confirmed in the County. The higher prevalence of respiratory illness in multiple forms means that everyone should be taking all the needed precautions to stop the spread of illness.

LOCAL SCHOOLS:

Local schools remain in session. Illness remains an issue, especially at the elementary levels. Respiratory illness can spread easily in classroom settings. The winter break that will begin near Christmas will provide separation in the county school age population and allow for recovery and hopefully result in lower infection rates when classes resume in January 2022.

The health and safety of children in our community remains our highest priority. In order for children to be in school they must be healthy. Everyone remains in agreement that families want children to be in school in person and benefit from classroom learning. We need everyone to work together to make sure that the school year is successful.

Local school districts are continuing to work to minimize the spread of all illnesses especially COVID-19 by conducting screening and testing daily. Please remember to not send a sick child to school for any reason. If a family member becomes ill with COVID-19 every family member MUST quarantine if they are not vaccinated or have natural immunity from a previously documented case of COVID-19. The ill person(s) MUST isolate for a minimum of 10 (ten) days.

You should always contact the Health Department or your local physician for specific guidance about how to deal with the illness in your home. The most important thing to remember is to not spread the illness to others. The same care and process must be followed if you have a child in daycare.

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COVID-19 TESTING:

People who are planning to travel for the Christmas Holiday and are traveling by air need to check to see if any testing prior to travel is required (mainly for travel outside the United States). Recent changes to travel testing have been announced in which travelers must present a negative test result no more than one day old when traveling. Additionally, travelers that have been ill within a predetermined time prior to travel but have recovered may be required to provide attestation from a licensed health care provider or the local public health officer that will allow them the ability to travel. All of these new developments and requirements will take time to complete and people (travelers) who may be affected by these changes should not wait till the last minute to plan for testing and any needed document preparation. If you are going to travel by air, especially outside of the USA check now and find out what documentation that you may require and call the Health Department to make the appointments necessary to make your travel possible.

If you develop symptoms of illness of any kind you are encouraged to be tested. The Health Department continues to offer rapid antigen testing in our daily drive-up lane. The antigen test detects proteins from the virus that causes COVID-19 which are present in the respiratory system. Test results are transmitted to people through a text messages, phone call or an email. These tests are quick and a good tool to identify people with illness. We will also continue to offer PCR testing which is more sensitive and definitive in confirming the presence of COVID-19. If you have illness symptoms and need testing please call the office and we will provide you details for when the testing lane will be open.

COWLEY COUNTY ILLNESS REPORT BY THE NUMBERS:

The positivity rate for the last week was down again from the previous week at 8.47% as compared to 11.13% last week and 15.89% two weeks ago. A comparison of the overall rates of infection in the non-vaccinated and vaccinated populations (see table below) illustrates the significant trend in illness spread.

Since June 1, 2021	Number of Cases	Percent of total
All cases	2625	100%
Vaccinated (break through)	286	11%
Non-Vaccinated	2339	89%

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Month to month new case information is presented numerically in the tables below:

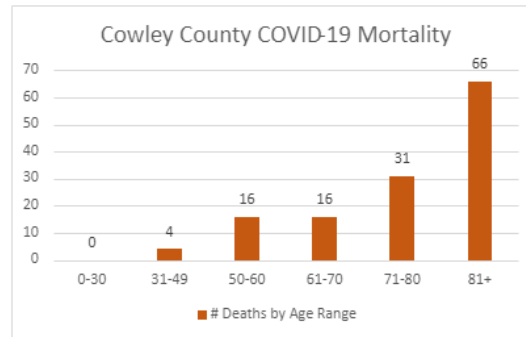
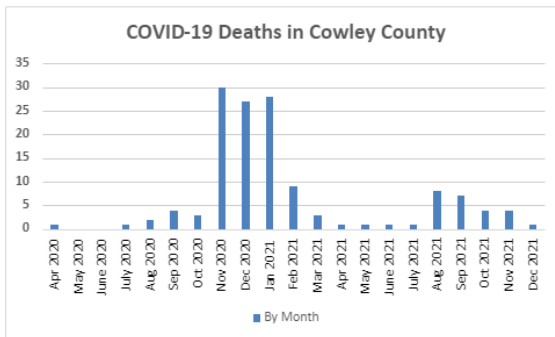
Month/Year	New Cases
June 2021	28
July 2021	153
August 2021	488
September 2021	592
October 2021	386
November 2021	606
December 2021	372
TOTAL	2625

COVID-19 Break through Cases	
June	4
July	25
August	50
September	45
October	38
November	67
December	52
TOTAL	286

BT Cases by Age	
12-18	10
19-35	43
36-60	107
60+	126
Total	286

BT Cases by Vaccine	
Moderna	167
Pfizer	77
Janssen	42
Total	286

Since the start of the pandemic, 6,714 Cowley County residents have been confirmed as positive for COVID-19. Three additional deaths were reported this week. Only one of the deaths occurred in December the additional reports were found during records reviews and involved a death that occurred in October and an additional death in November of this year. Overall, one hundred thirty-three (133) Cowley County residents have died from complications related to COVID-19 since March of 2020.



Cowley County remains identified as an area where infection remains widespread. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has updated their reporting of the ongoing pandemic for the state and individual counties including weekly county rankings. You can visit their website for more data: <https://www.coronavirus.kdheks.gov/160/COVID-19-in-Kansas> .

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OTHER COVID-19 NEWS:

Omicron Variant Update:

This week we've received calls from people asking about the new Delta variant that was referenced as Delta 2, but we have explained that there is no such thing as Delta 2. We hope that this was simply confusion connected to news reports or social media conversations.

On Thursday December 16, 2021 we were informed of the first official case of COVID-19 attributed to the SARS-CoV2 Omicron variant in Kansas (Franklin County).

Globally, this iteration of the virus, (Omicron) has gained notable status. That status is directly connected to new infection rate and viral spread. The growth rate of new Omicron variant cases in South Africa and Europe are far more vertical line more than horizontal, meaning that when this takes hold cases skyrocket. Many health experts are claiming that there has not been a modern-day virus that has spread as fast as this variant has.

Locally the reality is that we still need to wait and see how the Omicron variant will affect us in Cowley County. Current infection rate models indicate that this new kid on the block should start to show up real soon and begin spiking in mid-January 2022. If that model is correct what should we expect?

Once the variant arrives we expect to see a sharp increase of new COVID-19 cases once more. We will be watching closely to see if the cases are mild in nature and do not result in increased hospitalizations or increased mortality (deaths). We will be sharply focused on whether or not immunity both natural or acquired prevents new or re-infection.

One worst-case scenario includes conditions in which health care systems are overrun, mortality rates rapidly escalate, and large-scale closings and cancelations occur. Conversely one best-case scenario projects that we are barely affected and that those who do take ill only experience mild illness symptoms that rapidly arise but pass quickly with no long-term illness after affects.

Again, please understand that all of this is purely speculation, and we will not know the true affects until the variant arrives and we trace what occurs.

What we have learned is that SARS-CoV2 can and will quickly mutate in order to survive. Medical history has shown that as a virus mutates it tends to become less severe but more contagious. The key to slowing or stopping transmission rests in how the virus infects humans. We are hopeful that the number of hosts that can become infected in Cowley County will be much, much smaller now than it was one year ago due to immunity in the population.

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Booster doses: With all the concern being given to the Omicron variant it would be easy to claim that the new variant its made-up in order to scare people into being vaccinated. It truly is not. It is real and we expect that additional variants will arise over and over again.

The FDA has approved booster vaccinations for all people over age 16 that were previously vaccinated. If you are interested in a boost dose of COVID-19 vaccine please contact the Health Department and we will provide that for you. New this week is the addition of providing additional boost doses to the population aged 16 – 17 that completed their primary doses at least six (6) months ago.

The Pfizer mRNA vaccine in pediatric doses for children ages 5 to 12 is available and parents wishing to have their children vaccinated are encouraged to call to arrange appointments for children. All vaccines are available at both health department offices.

News reports about the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine being harmful and discontinued are not currently supported in fact. If you will recall the J&J vaccine was halted earlier this year due to reports about blood clotting and adverse health issues connected to that and having been vaccinated. There is a confirmed relationship that was found between J&J and thrombosis in some people. Currently the rate of such a complication occurring is 1 in 100,000. The reason it is being examined again is that medical boards will periodically review data to provide best practice recommendations when treatments such as new vaccines and medicines are introduced. They review adverse effects connected to one vaccine and then compare it to other data (in this case from m-RNA vaccines Pfizer & Moderna that have not shown thrombosis as a side effect). The end result of such comparisons and analysis is then handed down in the form of a recommendation. So, when someone would ask a provider for the J&J vaccine the known condition could be discussed and perhaps a different vaccine provided. When things like this occur in an emotionally charged environment where groups of people are strongly divided it can quickly be taken out of context to mean one product is superior to another and therefore the lesser product is bad. Remember sensational headlines sell news, be slow to make a conclusion on anything until you have closely looked at all the evidence and can understand truly what the issue is.

Vaccine Availability:

COVID-19 vaccine remains available in the county. As the Public Health Officer, I highly encourage the use of vaccines to prevent and stop the spread of ALL illness. I realize people have differing points of view on this matter. I remain willing to discuss with anyone their concerns about vaccine safety and efficacy and explain the reasons I believe the COVID-19 vaccines are working. As always I will respect and take into consideration the decisions of individuals.

Remember the emphasis of my position is to PREVENT illness and disease. The views that I hold are based in the data and other medical evidence available to me such as the overall rate of

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vaccination acceptance, COVID-19 illness rates compared over time, the overall infection and recovery rates in the Cowley County population, and current trends in illness which I monitor very closely. Everyone I speak with is tired of COVID-19 and I certainly understand that, however I recently read a remark from a researcher that paraphrased goes like this, “We are all exhausted, but the virus isn’t, and it won’t be until it no longer can find an unprotected host in which to further infect and spread.” Evidence proves that the virus does not listen to news reports or follow social media, it does not discriminate and knows no political ideology. It is actively seeking hosts that are unprotected in order to spread. There is a proven correlation showing that vaccination will reduce your risk of infection from COVID-19.

PERSONAL CARE AND ILLNESS PREVENTION:

Influenza is here! Sinus infection rates in the county have reached epidemic proportions. Environmental conditions (smoke, dust, dry air) have only made matters worse. We continue to see several different respiratory illnesses in circulation concurrently in the population. The Health Department urges everyone to roll up your sleeve and take the flu vaccine to reduce the rate of influenza related illness in the County.

Remember your individual health status is vital in combating illness of all kinds.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle includes eating nutritious foods, maintaining a healthy body weight, staying physically active, drinking plenty of water and getting adequate rest. If you and your doctor believe the use of vitamins and supplements can aid in keeping you healthy please use them.

If you do become ill, please do not participate in any group events until after you have fully recovered from illness. For as long as the pandemic persists Cowley County residents are advised to take all necessary precautions to prevent the contraction and spread of ANY illness.

- Stay home if you feel ill.
- If you develop symptoms of illness, be tested to determine if you are infected.
- Wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer.
- Clean high touch surfaces with disinfecting cleaners (doors, counters etc.).
- Wear a mask that properly covers your nose and mouth in enclosed places if required to do so or if you so desire.
- Avoid crowds and large social gatherings if you believe those settings are a risk for you.
- When ill you **MUST** stay home and isolate from others so you will not spread the virus or any other illness.
- Please be kind and respectful of others.

The next health update will be published Wednesday, December 22, 2021.
Stay well.