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City-Cowley County
Health Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 22, 2021

County Wide COVID-19 Update

It's Christmas week and all of us at the City-Cowley County Health Department wish you a Merry and Blessed Holiday Season and extend our hopes to all for a Healthy and Happy New Year ahead.

The 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 infections in Cowley County remain widespread. This overall condition likely will not change anytime soon as we endure the peak months (winter) for this type of illness.

LOCAL SCHOOLS:

Local schools are out for the semester.

COVID-19 TESTING:

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. Please note that over the Christmas – New Year period the schedule will vary.

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.

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Since June 1, 2021	Number of Cases	Percent of total
All cases	2745	100%
Vaccinated (break through)	291	11%
Non-Vaccinated	2454	89%

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

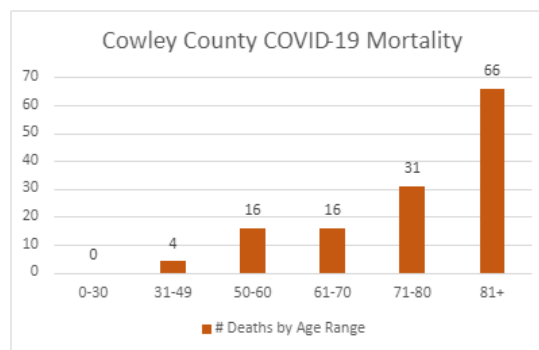
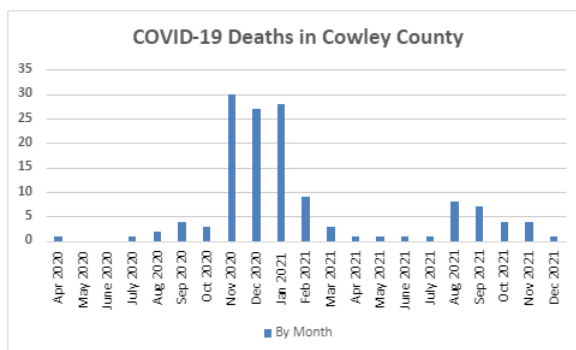
Month/Year	New Cases
June 2021	28
July 2021	153
August 2021	488
September 2021	592
October 2021	386
November 2021	606
December 2021	492
TOTAL	2745

COVID-19 Break through Cases	
June	4
July	25
August	51
September	45
October	42
November	67
December	57
TOTAL	291

BT Cases by Age	
12-18	10
19-35	46
36-60	108
60+	127
Total	291

BT Cases by Vaccine	
Moderna	170
Pfizer	79
Janssen	42
Total	291

Since the start of the pandemic, 6,824 Cowley County residents have been confirmed as positive for COVID-19. Overall, one hundred thirty-three (133) Cowley County residents have died from complications related to COVID-19 since March of 2020.



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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> .

OTHER COVID-19 NEWS:

Omicron Variant Update:

National and regional broadcast news is reporting that the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV2 is rampantly invading the population and causing widespread illness. While the headlines signal impending disaster, several questions loom here in Cowley County. In order to share what we know as of today the following questions and answers are being provided.

Q: Is the Omicron variant here in Cowley County?

A: It is likely that it is or very soon will be. People today travel in a widespread fashion. It is almost certain that someone who is infected will visit or interact with a local resident and spread the virus. With the holidays upon us personal interaction increases, and the risk escalates. After that occurs the domino effect will begin, the expected infection spread rate for the variant is 1:3 (one person will infect 3 and so on). So, the short answer is yes the virus is probably here.

Q: Can testing identify the Omicron variant.

A: Yes, however the type of testing needed to detect the genotype is the old school nasopharyngeal swab which is very seldom done anymore. The rapid testing that makes up over 90% of the testing done today does not identify which variant only the presence of the virus itself. This is another reason why we are likely unable to identify exactly when the new strain will make its appearance in the county population.

Q: Is our immunity either natural or acquired going to protect us?

A: The answer to that is yes. It may not be 100% effective for everyone, but immunity will provide protection that we believe will make any illness less severe and recovery much quicker.

Q: Why is Omicron so infectious?

A: This is a great question that really gets down to how viruses survive. A stable virus that only infects humans and does not mutate freely is the ideal candidate to eradicate from the world. SARS-CoV2 is not that type of virus. It is constantly changing and can infect other animals not

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just humans. Every being that is infected may contribute to the mutations. What was originally released upon the world in 2019 is far different today (i.e., the variants - Delta and Omicron). What has remained the same is how the virus infects a human host. The spike protein that carries the virus acts like a key to fit a lock (receptors). If the key doesn't fit quite correctly it slows down the process and allows our immune system to work. That is why with COVID-19 we have looked for symptoms 3 to 4 days after exposure because it has taken time to become infected. What each new variant does is create a key to our system that can be more efficient, think of a master key that opens all the locks in a building, if a virus mutates to that extent almost everyone will rapidly take ill, for example within 24 hours as opposed to 3-4 days. Remember the virus has one task, survive. It has no emotion or empathy for a host it is simply looking to infect and spread. If you have immunity we hope it remains strong. When you hear about boost doses they are designed to jump start your system to create more antibodies to fight the spike proteins and eliminate them before the virus can be delivered successfully. Each person is different and how our systems respond can vary greatly.

Q: Is the Delta variant gone now?

A: No. Sadly, Delta is still active and being spread, we are simply having a new strain of the virus joining the mix of what is circulating in the population.

Q: Will Omicron be more or less severe than what we have already seen from SARS-CoV2?

A: We do not know yet. What we do know is that several thousands of people have been vaccinated, and that several thousands more have been infected by the various strains to date. We will now see what occurs as the new strain makes its way through our population. The projections that are being made look at best- and worst-case scenarios. It is likely that the true outcome will be somewhere in the middle. That means we should expect increased illness, we will see increased numbers of people needing professional care and perhaps hospitalization, and we will likely see increased fatalities associated with the new wave. When we compare where we are today with where we were one year ago we already see proof that immunity does work and will help.

Vaccine 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 virus variants will arise over and over again. SARS-CoV2 is not going away anytime soon. It's not political issue it's a virus.

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

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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.

The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine remains an option for people that however it has been concluded that due to adverse health issues (thrombosis) connected to the vaccine in some people that it should not be recommended as being as effective as the mRNA vaccines. So, when someone would ask a provider for the J&J vaccine the known condition that could occur will be discussed and perhaps a different vaccine provided.

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.

There is a proven correlation showing that vaccination will reduce your risk of infection from COVID-19.

Oral Antiviral for COVID-19:

The following is reprinted from a press release from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration:

Today, the FDA issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for Pfizer's Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets, co-packaged for oral use) for the treatment of mild-to-moderate coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in adults and pediatric patients (12 years of age and older weighing at least 40 kilograms or about 88 pounds) with positive results of direct SARS-CoV-2 testing, and who are at high risk for progression to severe COVID-19, including hospitalization or death. Paxlovid is available by prescription only and should be initiated as soon as possible after diagnosis of COVID-19 and within five days of symptom onset. Paxlovid is not authorized for the pre-exposure or post-exposure prevention of COVID-19 or for initiation of treatment in those requiring hospitalization due to severe or critical COVID-19. Paxlovid is not a substitute for vaccination in individuals for whom COVID-19 vaccination and a booster dose are recommended.

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PERSONAL CARE AND ILLNESS PREVENTION:

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.

At this point in time, we have gone over and over the steps people should take to prevent the contraction and spread of a respiratory virus. Please take those precautions to protect yourself and your loved ones.

If you do become ill, please do not participate in any group events until after you have fully recovered from your 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 public 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 29, 2021.

Merry Christmas – Stay well.