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City-Cowley County  
Health Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 30, 2021

### **County Wide COVID-19 Update**

All of us at the City-Cowley County Health Department extend our hopes to all for a Healthy and Happy New Year ahead. We advise caution and moderation in seasonal activities including parties. A combination of winter weather, heightened risk of respiratory viral illness and unwise decisions to operate motor vehicles after having consumed alcohol could result in poor outcomes. Please start your New Year off safe and healthy.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** *During the past week the Health Department telephone system has not been functioning properly. The results have been missed incoming calls or callers telling us that the phone would ring but not be answered. We are working with the IT department to try and resolve this issue and apologize for the inconvenience. Please do not stop trying to contact us. You can email the health department at the Administrators email address listed in this release (see top of page) and the appropriate staff will return your call or message.*

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 continue to increase and 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

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period the schedule will vary. We will post the testing schedule on our official web site and on the Facebook social media page for your convenience.

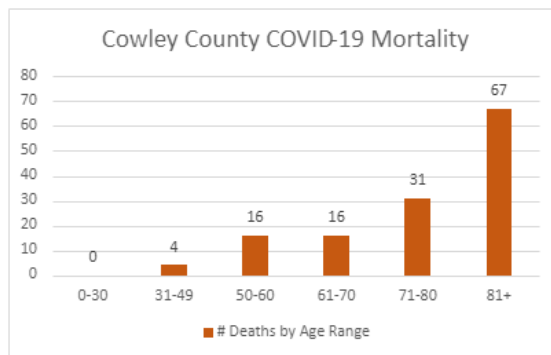
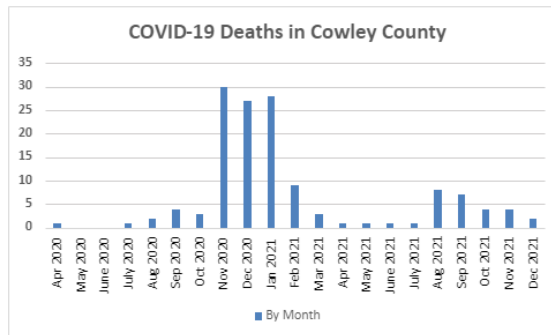
**COWLEY COUNTY ILLNESS REPORT BY THE NUMBERS:**

The positivity rate for the last week was stable at 6.92% but the testing volumes have risen dramatically and are comparable to the peaks witnessed in late 2020. On average nearly 100 people are testing in Cowley County each day.

Since the start of the pandemic, over 7,000 COVID cases have been confirmed in Cowley County. Four thousand one hundred fifty-nine (4,159) of those cases have occurred during 2021 (as of December 30<sup>th</sup>). Overall, one hundred thirty-four (134) Cowley County residents have died from complications related to COVID-19 since March of 2020.

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

Month/Year	New Cases
January 2021	828
February 2021	304
March 2021	90
April 2021	47
May 2021	59
June 2021	28
July 2021	153
August 2021	488
September 2021	592
October 2021	386
November 2021	606
December 2021*	653
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4159</b>



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:**

On December 30, 2021 the Public Health Officer received notification that a positive COVID-19 test sample submitted to the state public health laboratory for genotyping was found to be the Omicron variant.

It is expected that we will see a sharp increase in positive cases in the next 30 days and perhaps longer.

On December 27, 2021 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidance for the management of COVID-19 Omicron variant cases that included a shortened period of isolation (5 days) followed by a period of mandatory mask wearing (5 days). In Cowley County we are currently NOT adopting that guidance. We do not have the capacity to immediately identify which SARS-CoV2 variant a person may be infected with. We CAN identify the presence of SARS-CoV2 with great certainty. Since there is no way to rapidly identify the exact lineage of the virus we are opting to maintain the guidance that we currently have in place (10-day protocol).

We are hopeful that the new variant will not cause severe illness as we have seen previously. However, we have no evidence of that currently. In order to protect health of community members we are choosing to proceed cautiously. The state health department (KDHE) will be releasing new guidance soon on this same issue and we will consider this as we move forward into 2022. One thing is already quite evident, the new rules will be very difficult to interpret and likely even more difficult to follow. In Cowley County mask wearing has been largely disregarded by the population, getting people to wear masks again will be a nearly impossible task.

How the new surge in cases will affect employers, schools, long term care and critical health care (hospitals) is yet to be seen.

Expect new guidance to evolve as we learn more about how Omicron impacts our local population health in the weeks ahead.

### **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

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concerns about vaccine safety and efficacy and explain the reasons I believe the COVID-19 vaccines are working even as the new variant arrives. As always I will respect and take into consideration the decisions of individuals.

### **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 Friday, January 7, 2022

Happy New Year

Stay well.