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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2021

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

The City-Cowley County Health Department continues to monitor the health of our county residents and the ongoing cases of COVID-19 locally. The following is a weekly update to inform the community of the current status of the pandemic in Cowley County.

What a difference a week can make. This week the big news surrounding the pandemic has come from the federal sector. Third (3<sup>rd</sup>) doses of vaccine are being made available under a revised emergency use authorization (EUA) for those people with immune systems that are suppressed or effected by chronic illness or who use specific immune system medications. Evidence currently shows that people who were vaccinated and are immunocompromised remain at high risk for being hospitalized if they contract COVID-19. It has been especially evident when looking at the “break-through” cases that have occurred in the recent weeks. If you have questions about this change in vaccination protocol, please contact your physician or call us for more details and to review your personal risk.

As expected, when this information was released publicly our phone lines became quite busy with people asking what all this means for them. I apologize if you called, and we were unable to answer your call immediately. For the vast majority of people this is not a time to rush in for a 3<sup>rd</sup> or “booster” dose. It is however the precursor to what is likely to occur in a broader scale in the weeks and months ahead and as was projected last winter.

Information shared with us this week outlines that the FDA is nearing final approval status for the current vaccines being used in the United States (Moderna, Pfizer and J&J). It is likely that we will see that announcement become official in the next few weeks. It is projected that on or around the third week of September boost doses (3<sup>rd</sup> doses) will be made available for the general population. The recommended interval appears to be at minimum eight (8) months from your 2<sup>nd</sup> dose. We expect many people in the community will want the follow up vaccination and we are preparing for that now.

We have already noticed an increased demand for vaccination locally. We continue to have all three vaccines available, Moderna, Pfizer and J&J (limited) available. If you would like more information, please call us and we can discuss any concerns or questions you may have and arrange a vaccination visit for if you so desire.

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In Cowley County COVID-19 is continuing to spread. This week one hundred-thirty-two (132) new cases have been identified, up significantly from the eighty-nine (89) new cases recorded last week. To date we have recorded three hundred-fifteen (315) new cases in August. There are currently ninety-six (96) active cases in the county. We have recorded four hundred-sixty-eight (468) new cases of COVID-19 since July 1, 2021.

Since March 31, 2021 five hundred-ninety-nine (599) new cases have occurred in our county. Seventy-two (72) of those cases have occurred in the vaccinated population and are classified as break through cases. As reported last week twenty (20) of the 72 cases were found in a local long-term care facility that suffered an outbreak which remains under investigation due to the high failure rate of the vaccine provided to that group of people. The facility did not receive the vaccine from a local Cowley County vaccine provider.

During that same time period five hundred-ten (510) new cases have occurred in the unvaccinated population in the county. Our county-wide fatality total has now risen to one hundred-fourteen (114). We learned this week that 3 people who were hospitalized recently did not recover. Sadly, we know that age and co-morbidities contributed to their deaths, but they all were ill with COVID-19 at the time they passed.

The overall rate of infection in the non-vaccinated population is significantly higher than the vaccinated population as expected (see table below).

Since March 31, 2021	Number of Cases	Percent of total
All cases	599	100%
Vaccinated (break through)	72	12.0%
Non-Vaccinated	527	88.0%

Testing numbers continue to climb in conjunction with the increased illness numbers. Data received from local testing providers indicates that eight hundred-seventy-three (873) people have been tested so far this month (that number is lower than expected and likely does not include all the local testing performed in long-term care facilities due to reporting lags). The crude infection rate for the month has ballooned to 53.6% This number in itself is staggering to look at but requires deeper analysis. During our peak contagion months during 2020 (Nov.-Dec.) we witnessed similarly high rates. It is explained simply, people who have symptoms are tested those who are not don't seek out testing, as COVID-19 is the predominant illness in the community currently we are seeing the rate spike. We are no longer testing trying to determine if COVID has arrived, we are testing now to determine if people have contracted the virus or are suffering from other respiratory illnesses. What this means to all of us is simple, if you have symptoms please get tested!

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Results of virus genotyping continue to indicate the Delta variants (B.1.617.2 = 66.4% & AY.3 = 30.3%) remain the dominant cause (96.7%) of current infections in Cowley County and across Kansas and the region.

We are now on pace to record as many as **500** new cases in Cowley County during August 2021.

For your information we will chart and post the monthly numbers in the table below:

Month/Year		New Cases
April	2021	47
May	2021	56
June	2021	28
July	2021	<b>153</b>
August	2021 (to date)	<b>315</b>

Cowley County, along with all counties in Kansas, remain identified as an area where infection is currently widespread. Community members are advised to take all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of illness. Stay home if you feel ill, wash your hands frequently, use hand sanitizer, wear a mask if you so desire, avoid crowds and large social gatherings - especially people unknown to you. If you develop any symptoms of illness, be tested to determine if you are infected and to seek medical help. You are also reminded that you **MUST** stay home and isolate from others if you are ill. Please do not go out and spread the virus further.

Local hospitals are reporting that their COVID care capacity is at or near their limits. People requiring hospitalization are being transferred to hospitals wherever space can be found often outside our local county and region.

Remember the virus does not discriminate. It will seek out a host that is unprotected in order to spread. Current data indicates that if you are not vaccinated your risk of infection is significantly higher than if you were vaccinated. We urge you to consider vaccination to protect your health. **THE CHOICE IS YOURS**, and we respect your choice.

Additional vaccination events for the community are being planned. The Health Department will be involved with many of these events please monitor local news and our web site and Facebook page for details. Vaccine is also available through local pharmacies and at the Health Department.

We will update this report next Friday, August 27, 2021, until then I hope you all stay well.