

## **Public Health News: Friday May 28, 2021**

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City Cowley County Health Department

The Health Department will be closed Monday in observance of Memorial Day.

So far during the month of May (1<sup>st</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>) 360 new COVID-19 tests were performed.

The Health Department has recorded 34 new cases during that time and the total for COVID-19 cases in Cowley County since March of 2020 is now near 4000.

One new death related to COVID-19 occurred but is not yet reflected in the County total maintained by the State Health Department. The latest fatality was a woman who contracted the virus in late April and passed in the first two weeks of May. All of the new local cases have occurred in people without immunity (either acquired through vaccination or natural, having been ill and recovered).

Trends in virus transmission continue to be closely watched. 38% of the new cases in May have been in people aged 0-18 including a growing number of infections found in young children (ages 4-12). The majority of these cases are attributed to close family contact and spread that way, but some were also connected to social exposures at school, sports, or similar settings. This change is concerning because to this point in time children have shown greater resilience to COVID-19, however, as the virus continues to circulate and mutate, variant strains may prove to be equally able to infect children as well as adults.

The talk about variants will continue into the future. Viruses change through mutation. The cases that we are tracking nationally and statewide are vastly different from those we faced last fall. Today over 60% of the new cases being found in Kansas are of the B.1.1.7 United Kingdom strain. That is also true in Cowley County though we have confirmed India and California cases as well.

The good news thus far is that vaccination acquired immunity is holding firm against the current variants with no “break-through” cases being found.

Our local data indicates that over 12,500 people in Cowley County have been vaccinated, nearly 3900 people that have been infected with COVID-19 in the County have survived the illness and developed natural immunity. That means that close to 48% of the local population has some level of immunity. Community immunity rates of that magnitude will help slow the spread of illness but not stop it.

We are pleased that the pandemic has slowed and that we are resuming our cherished activities. Please do not think that COVID-19 is completely over and abandon all precautions to prevent illness spread. The SARS-CoV2 virus is with us forever and will not go away. We have evidence of that. For us to make it irrelevant in our lives we need to reduce the transmission rate to less than one new case per month. The only way that will occur is through immunity. The only way to acquire immunity is through surviving a case of COVID-19 or by being vaccinated.

This part of my message is not trying to scare or coerce anyone, and it is a statement made free of political rhetoric. At the Health Department the demand for COVID-19 vaccines has slowed considerably. We are vaccinating between 10 to 20 people each week now, whereas we were vaccinating hundreds of people just 8 weeks ago. I hope that if you have not been vaccinated that you

contact the Health Department and become so. Being vaccinated is far safer than taking the risk of getting sick and hoping that you will not suffer long term or life ending consequences. If you are unsure and would like to speak with the Public Health Officer about being vaccinated please call the Health Department, I will be happy to discuss your concerns about the vaccines.

I hope that everyone enjoys the Memorial Day weekend and remembers the brave men and women that have served our nation and given their lives to protect our freedoms. I hope that no new cases of illness of any kind are contracted within our County so everyone remains Healthy and Happy!

Stay well.