

320 E. 9th Suite B
Winfield, KS 67156
Phone: (620) 221-1430
Fax: (620) 221-0389



City-Cowley County
Health Department

115 E. Radio Lane
Arkansas City, KS 67005
Phone: (620) 442-3260
Fax: (620) 442-1759

Contact: Thomas Langer
Cowley County Public Health Officer
Health Department Administrator
620-221-1430
Email: tlanger@cowleycounty.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 20, 2021

County Wide COVID-19 Update

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

September has been a very busy month to date. The resumption of school athletic activities, Labor Day weekend events, and the Walnut Valley Festival have all occurred over the past 20 days. Personal activities connected to all these events and normal daily life have created opportunities for the continued spread of COVID-19 in the county. Over the past 14 days a noticeable increase in new cases has occurred centered in families with school aged children.

LOCAL SCHOOLS:

Local school districts are working to minimize the spread of all illnesses especially COVID-19. The Health Department has noted that 43% of new cases found in September are in school aged children (5 -18 y/o). By comparison during September of 2020 that same group comprised less than 5% of all COVID-19 cases.

The health and safety of children in our community will remain 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. 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.

COVID-19 TESTING:

If you develop symptoms of illness 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

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results are generally available within 15 minutes following sample processing. Results of the tests are transmitted to people through a text message 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 each day.

LOCAL EVENTS & GATHERINGS:

The Walnut Valley Festival at the Winfield Fairgrounds has concluded. We offered testing and vaccinations for festival goers and staff for a 3-week period leading up to and including the festival itself. The response to offering the services was very good.

Several campers and festival goers requested to be tested upon arrival and prior to leaving to return to their homes. All of the visitors that the Health Department provided service to tested negative for COVID-19 even though some complained of allergy like symptoms while in town (which a large number of local residents can relate to). The distribution of masks and hand sanitizer was exceptionally welcomed by festival attendees and visitors. (During the entire event we only had 1 (one) festival goer test positive, a local elementary school student who had been sent home from school and who's parent was camping and wanted to have tested).

Some people did stop by the Health Department testing site to offer criticism about the lack of overall mask wearing by the public which may have been different to what they were accustomed to. However, the people in attendance and camping were mostly very careful and courteous to individuals whose position concerning, masks or vaccination was different from their own.

As stated previously there will be more large-scale events occurring in the weeks ahead including Arkalalah near the end of October, we hope that everyone will help in making these events as safe as possible for everyone. You may be excited about what is occurring, or you may choose to not attend, we understand those perspectives and encourage you to make your best decision to attend or avoid these events. Please remember to respect each other and be kind. Provide space between your group and others, and please if you are ill do not attend any public event.

COWLEY COUNTY ILLNESS REPORT BY THE NUMBERS:

Testing rates in Cowley County for COVID-19 have remain steady and new illness findings fluctuate daily but are not skyrocketing out of control. We continue to average approximately 100 active cases daily in the county.

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 March 31, 2021	Number of Cases	Percent of total
All cases	1137	100%
Vaccinated (break through)	99	9.0%
Non-Vaccinated	1038	91.0%

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

Month/Year	New Cases
April 2021	47
May 2021	56
June 2021	28
July 2021	153
August 2021	488
September 2021* to date	375

One (1) additional death occurred last week. 118 Cowley County residents have died from complications related to COVID-19 infection since March of 2020.

Cowley County, along with all counties in Kansas, remains identified as an area where infection is considered 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:

As stated last week vaccination mandates are NOT being issued locally by the Public Health Officer. Locally our role remains the same. We will continue to provide sound medical advice about vaccination and the local conditions including illness within the County.

As the Public Health Officer, I highly endorse the use of vaccine to stop the spread of illness. I will be happy to talk to anyone about their concerns and explain the reasons I believe that the vaccines are safe and effective. I will always support their use, but I will always take into consideration the decisions of individuals.

The most recent news is focusing on the anticipated availability of a lower dose COVID-19 vaccine being made available for school children age five (5) to eleven (11). We will keep you updated on this as it is anticipated to be available in early to mid-October 2021.

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Please do not let the noise coming from 24 hour news and social media outlets deter you or anger you. The virus does not discriminate and knows no political ideology. It will continue to evolve and seek out a host that is unprotected in order to spread. Current data continues to indicate that if you are not vaccinated your risk of infection with COVID-19 is significantly higher than if you were vaccinated. I hope that you look at what is happening locally and base your decisions about your health, including vaccinations, on those facts. Within the community remains your choice.

PERSONAL CARE AND ILLNESS PREVENTION:

It should never be overlooked that 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.

Remember that 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 any symptoms of illness, be tested to determine if you are infected and to seek medical help.
- Wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer.
- Wear a mask 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.
- You **MUST** stay home and isolate from others if you are ill so you will not spread the virus or any other illness to others.
- Please be kind and respectful of others.

We will issue an update next Monday afternoon September 27, 2021.

Stay well.