



# Chaffee County Public Health

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For immediate release:

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## CCPH Plans for New Chapter in COVID-19 Response in the Midst of an Alarming Surge

Chaffee County, Colorado- Colorado is losing its battle against COVID-19. Colorado is one of the worst faring states in the country. Currently, 1 in 48 Coloradans is infected with COVID-19. There are only 120 ICU hospital beds open in the state. The state's healthcare system is surging, ill COVID-19 patients are taking up the majority of our healthcare system's capacity, and there are grave concerns that our local healthcare system, mainly our hospital, is just a few cases away from having to turn away people who are in need of services due to capacity. Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center (HRRMC) recently has had to make the tough decision to limit certain procedures and to implement heightened mitigation measures to protect staff and patients. Colorado has activated crisis standards of care. This reiterates- while our state no longer has mandates and only minor local restrictions, we are still very much in a crisis. The crisis standards of care include:

- Expand the availability of health care workers and health care resources to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and to serve patients seeking non-COVID-19 related care;
- Assure that guardrails and supports are in place to optimize workplace safety, health care worker resilience in the face of moral and physical stress, patient safety, and health outcomes of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients.

Local incidence rates are the worst experienced throughout the pandemic- about 500 cases per 100,000 people. Chaffee County Public Health (CCPH) has had to prioritize which cases get investigated and which ones get their isolation and quarantine information in a more automated way, depending on personal accountability and responsibility for positive cases to follow isolation and forward quarantine expectations to their close contacts. CCPH has been met with resistance when conducting contact tracing and case investigating, so it is moving toward a more streamlined and straightforward approach to give the public the resources in their toolkit to make the right decisions and assume the risk that not following them has on their decisions. As our society has chosen to live its life to its fullest, despite the global pandemic that continues, CCPH hopes that the public will continue to follow the various press releases, weekly situational awareness reports, social media posts, public health orders, and the county data dashboard to assess the risk that it is willing to take when participating in essential and non-essential activities. Updates to the Chaffee County COVID-19 website are forthcoming, including a Home Testing 101 document to provide instructions on how to appropriately and responsibly test at home. The website can be found here: <https://www.chaffeecounty.org/Public-Health-Coronavirus>.

In order to curb the recent concerning transmission trends and avoid any future public health orders and restrictions, the following are strong recommendations from CCPH:

- Fully vaccinated activities are optimal. If this isn't possible, a combination of vaccination and aggressive testing strategies is preferred. Consider moving to a virtual or hybrid model when meetings and events must take place indoors. Outdoors is optimal. There is still a 75% capacity limit for indoor events in the local public health order.
- Continue to wear masks in indoor public settings, regardless of vaccination status, especially when vaccination status is unknown.
- Avoid crowds, regardless of vaccination status, especially when vaccination status is unknown.
- Get vaccinated. Get boosted.
- Stay home when sick.

Andrea Carlstrom, Director of CCPH, says, "Transmission of COVID-19 in our county is at an all-time high. Sources of transmission are varied, but we are seeing an alarming trend in person-to-person transmission from unvaccinated household members and visitors. At this time, we are moving toward automating and streamlining our systems to keep up with the demand that every new case places on the public health and healthcare systems. Therefore, it is very possible that the data we have been able to previously collect and provide on our local data dashboard may no longer be feasible to report on. We want the public to be aware of this as our response evolves and we attempt to reach a more sustainable effort. We urge the public to please consider scaling back activities and events until we can get a handle on our recent surge. Consider implementing mitigation measures as much as possible. CCPH is trusting that individuals and groups will do the right thing, incorporating these strategies into their planning so that people can safely congregate. While we want to avoid further mandates or restrictions, we also must protect our healthcare system from breaching."

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