



Chaffee County Public Health

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Chaffee County Public Health Provides Update on COVID-19 Response

Chaffee County, Colorado- Several announcements coming from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) over the past several days are pointing the public toward a very promising and optimistic chapter of the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on learning to live with COVID-19 in our lives for the unforeseeable future. While Chaffee County Public Health (CCPH) has been preparing its staff and operations for this more “normalized” approach, treating COVID-19 through routine disease control, for the past couple of months as more was learned about the Omicron variant while also communicating this inevitable phase with county leaders and the general public, the recent announcements allow CCPH, the Chaffee County Board of Health, and its partners to move forward from what has been a very dynamic and strenuous two years.

The following are the announcements made and what they mean for Chaffee County:

CDPHE Roadmap released last Friday, February 25th: The roadmap recognizes the significant milestones that Colorado and local public health agencies have achieved over the past two years while also ensuring healthcare systems are prepared for future response efforts and normalizing COVID-19 treatment and prevention back into traditional health care settings, building on lessons learned so the public health and emergency management fields can expand and contract for disease control and other emergency needs, stabilizing the current workforce and building and maintaining sustainable health care workforce for the future, striving for a national plan for pandemic readiness and response, and investing in the public health system, including an updated and interoperable national surveillance system, and flexible, non-categorical funding to allow flexibility and increase the public health workforce. People who are fully up to date with their COVID-19 vaccine are urged to live their lives as normal. Those who remain unvaccinated or are immunosuppressed/high-risk of severe illness should make a testing and treatment plan with their medical provider. Locally, healthcare stakeholders will be meeting to explore embedding testing, vaccinations, and treatment into the traditional models and moving away from receiving those services in busses, cars, etc. In many ways, this is already being done in the county.

CDC Community-Level Recommendations released last Friday, February 25th: CDC will be looking at the combination of three metrics — new COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population in the past 7 days, the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and total new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in the past 7 days — to determine the COVID-19 community level. New COVID-19 admissions and the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied represent the current potential for strain on the health system. Data on new cases acts as an early warning indicator of potential increases in health system strain in the event of a COVID-19 surge. Using these data sets, the COVID-19 community level is classified as low, medium, or high. Currently, Chaffee County is at a low level which means that most individuals and households get fully vaccinated and boosted, increase ventilation

throughout indoor public places when possible, continue to follow isolation and quarantine if exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19, and those that are immunosuppressed or high-risk of severe disease have a plan for testing and treatment. Universal masking in indoor public places is only recommended in the highest level, although at all levels, people can wear a mask based on personal preference, informed by personal level of risk. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask per isolation and quarantine protocols. CCPH, with Board of Health support, will use local surveillance data, along with CDC and CDPHE data, to make an informed decision before any changes are made to additional recommendations or requirements. More information can be found at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html#anchor_82254.

CDC No Longer Recommends Contact Tracing and Case Investigation released Monday, February 28th: CDC is no longer recommending universal case investigation and contact tracing and is recommending prioritizing case investigation and contact tracing (CI/CT) for specific settings and populations/groups at increased risk for adverse outcomes, along with continued vaccination efforts, and education efforts around isolation, quarantine, testing, treatment, and mitigation measures. According to CDC, these changes are a result of high levels of infection or vaccine induced immunity, availability of vaccines and treatments, decreased participation by the public, increased use of self-tests, and changes in the clinical presentation and severity of cases (milder illness or more asymptomatic cases with the Omicron variant). Therefore, CCPH plans on scaling back on its CI/CT staffing starting the week of March 6th and will keep some staffing capacity to meet current and potential demand. Likewise, the Chaffee County data dashboard will also be gradually updated to reflect the data that is captured locally, deaths and hospitalizations, while providing links to the relevant data collected by the CDC and CDPHE. Information on testing, vaccine, treatment, and what to do if someone tests positive for COVID-19 or is a close contact to someone who has will continue to be found on the dashboard and Chaffee County COVID-19 website.

CCPH, along with the Chaffee County Board of Health, decided on Tuesday, March 1st to let the local public health order expire with the understanding that if future variants or another communicable disease present a significant threat to the public, this measure will be revisited. Similarly, universal masking in county-owned buildings is no longer required. CCPH will continue to support businesses or employers that still require masking, and the public is advised to keep a mask available in the event that they are asked to wear one.

Despite all of the latest announcements related to COVID-19, healthcare entities are still required to follow the CDC's recommendations which can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>.

“While it is uncertain how long this hopeful chapter of our COVID-19 response will last and what the future has in store for us in regard to future public health emergencies, it is imperative that we enjoy a period of respite and restoration from the pandemic as we continue to build healthcare and public health workforce and surge capacity at the same time. I am proud of our county for making the sacrifices and tough decisions necessary to get us to this important milestone in the pandemic. Come to find out, learning to live with a new disease is not black and white but rather gradients of gray. I hope that everyone can strike a balance in their own lives to continue to follow isolation and quarantine protocols, adopt the best practices that we have been promoting, such as vaccination, diligent hand washing, and staying home when sick, and most importantly, normalizing COVID-19,” said Andrea Carlstrom, Director of CCPH and Incident Commander for the Chaffee County COVID-19 pandemic.

For testing information, go to: bit.ly/ChaffeeCOVIDTesting

For vaccination information, go to: bit.ly/ChaffeeCOVIDVaccines

For treatment information, go to: bit.ly/ChaffeeCOVIDTreatment

For information on what to do if someone tests positive or is a close contact, go to: <https://www.chaffeecounty.org/Public-Health-Coronavirus#positive>.

