



GRAND COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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December 2, 2021

Public Health Advisory Notice for Grand County, Colorado

Hospitals have been close to maximum capacities across the state with available beds consistently below 10% and at times less than 5% making critical care difficult to find. Many patients are being cared for in emergency departments rather than in a proper hospital bed or ICU for periods of time while an appropriate transfer location can be found. While COVID-19 is not the only contributor for the extreme shortage of hospital beds, it is greatly impacting our healthcare systems.

We have confirmation that the newest Variant of Concern-Omicron, has been detected in Arapahoe County, Colorado. It is apparent that Omicron has been causing illness for multiple months prior to its discovery in South Africa on 11/24/2021. Now is not the time for panic, but for caution.

Currently, it is unknown how efficiently the Omicron variant can spread from person to person. It is unknown whether Omicron is more transmissible than other variants, but preliminary data from South Africa suggest that the mutations to the receptor binding protein of the variant virus will confer increased infectivity. Currently, there is limited information about the clinical manifestations of infection due to the Omicron variant and given the small number of identified cases attributed to the Omicron variant to date, current assessment of disease severity and response to vaccines and therapeutics is difficult. Preliminary information from South Africa indicates that there are no unusual symptoms associated with Omicron variant infection, and as with other variants, some patients are asymptomatic. Symptoms may be milder in persons who have been vaccinated or previously infected with SARS CoV-2.

Our current PCR testing is still able to detect the COVID-19 virus Omicron variant and vaccines should still be effective against severe outcomes for those that may come in contact with the variant. The PCR test will identify a positive COVID-19 case but a separate lab process is required to sequence the DNA of the virus to know which variant a positive case may have. Viral sequencing may take two to three weeks to result.

Grand County Public Health is prepared and working closely with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to quickly identify and isolate those that have positive omicron variants. We are in a unique position here with visitors coming to our community from all over the world. We need to continue to be attentive.

We have all the tools we need to protect ourselves, our students, and our community to diminish opportunities for COVID-19 to spread and cause severe illness. These prevention methods work best when layered by reducing disruptions to our students, staff, and businesses due to illness and quarantines. Grand County Public Health strongly recommends:

- 1) Get vaccinated if you are eligible (Ages 5-100+ are now eligible to receive FDA EUA approved COVID-19 vaccines)
- 2) Get the booster if you have had both mRNA (Moderna or Pfizer) doses 6 months or longer, or the Johnson & Johnson dose 2 months or longer.
- 3) Wear a mask in public indoor spaces regardless of vaccine status
- 4) Interact with others in outdoor spaces or well ventilated areas whenever possible
- 5) Distance yourself 6 ft. from others outside of your household
- 6) Get tested if you are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19
- 7) Purchase home tests and use them before attending a large event
- 8) Stay home if you are sick or waiting for a COVID test result
- 9) Seek monoclonal antibody treatment if you test positive (available at Middle Park Health)

Our local economy depends on a healthy and available workforce to keep businesses alive. Grand County Public Health also encourages businesses to protect their staff and their patrons by implementing mask or vaccine requirements in order to stay open and keep staff healthy.

Vaccines are proving to be about 75% effective at preventing illness, and 86-92% effective at reducing severe illness, hospitalization, and death against COVID-19. No vaccine is 100% effective at preventing illness. Our goal is to prevent severe illness and death from happening and decrease the need for hospitalization. COVID-19 vaccine is available in multiple locations in Grand County. Take a look at our website for where you can get your vaccine <https://www.co.grand.co.us/vaccine>. You can also schedule your appointment for the flu vaccine with this link.

Using these prevention measures will also help our hospitals rebound from the huge increase in demand for hospital beds and ICU beds.

Public Health offers free rapid testing between 10am and 12pm on Thursdays (except for holidays) at 620 Hemlock St, Hot Sulphur Springs, CO. No appointment is needed.

There is also a new schedule for the drive thru saliva PCR testing available behind the Inn at Silvercreek on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturdays **now from 10am to 2pm**. There will not be testing on December 24th, 25th, 31st, and January 1st.

If you are preparing for travel and need a test, please plan ahead. If the rapid testing or drive thru testing schedule doesn't work for your travel needs, reach out to your medical provider. Testing options are available on our website- <https://www.co.grand.co.us/1419/COVID-Testing-Options-in-Grand-County>

Public health is focused on monitoring the severity of COVID illness over the number of cases. We know illness will happen. What we are most concerned with is reducing the number of people requiring hospital care. We have an opportunity to prevent over running our already strained healthcare systems. It is up to each of us working together taking the necessary precautions to make a difference for Grand County and Public Health fully supports individual rights and decision making in our community. Even small, individual decisions can have a big impact. Please help by doing your part to protect the health of Grand County.

Be kind, stay diligent and stay safe!

Sincerely,

Abbie Baker-MPH, CHES
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