

December 11, 2020

Rural Health Information during COVID-19



Dear Rural Stakeholders,

To continue to have consistent and efficient communication to provide rural health stakeholders with the information needed during this global pandemic, here are updates from the rural health programs at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

As mentioned previously, for critical information relating to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we recommend that you regularly monitor information on the [Iowa Department of Public Health COVID-19 Page](#). In addition, discover the latest resources, maps and information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) on coronavirus.iowa.gov.

For additional resources and updates, see the following pages. Please reach out for technical assistance and for any questions you may have.

We are an ongoing resource for you.

Best,

Rural Health Programs

Iowa Department of Public Health

For questions, contact:

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Update:

On Dec 4, 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the [first diagnostic test for at home collection of patient samples](#) to detect both COVID-19 and influenza A and B (flu). The FDA authorized Quest Diagnostics RC COVID-19 +Flu RT-PCR Test for prescription use with the Quest Diagnostics Self-Collection Kit for COVID-19 +Flu by individuals who are suspected of respiratory viral infection consistent with COVID-19 when home collection is determined to be appropriate by an individual's healthcare provider. Under a health care provider's order, patients can collect a sample at home and ship it to a Quest Diagnostics laboratory for analysis following the instructions included with the self-collection kit. To read more, see [The FDA authorizes the first diagnostic test for at home collection of patient samples to detect both COVID-19 and influenza A and B \(flu\)](#).

Resources:

COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave Protections for Agricultural Workers: Details the sick leave protections outlined in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and how they apply to farmworkers. Breaks down the policy by reason for being unable to work, who the policy applies to, length of protection, and pay. Also, highlights state-level sick leave protection policies in prominent farmworker states. To read more, see [COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave Protections for Agricultural Workers](#).

Vaccine Information and Tribal Support: Resources and information to help tribes engage regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. Includes information from federal agencies, recorded webinars and presentations, insights from experts, and more. To read more, see [Vaccine Information and Tribal Support](#).

Rural Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations to Advance Value-Based Payment and Care During and Beyond the COVID-19 Crisis: Describes the key challenges rural primary care and behavioral health providers have faced in delivering care since COVID-19, in addition to the policy changes implemented in response to those challenges. Offers state-level policy recommendations for improving rural primary care and behavioral health services. To read more, see [Rural Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations to Advance Value-Based Payment and Care During and Beyond the COVID-19 Crisis](#).

Summary of Guidance for Public Health Strategies to Address High Levels of Community Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and Related Deaths, December 2020: Identifies a set of evidence-based public health strategies to protect healthcare, essential businesses, and schools during a phase of high-level COVID-19 transmission. Explains strategies for communities and individuals addressing face mask use, physical distancing, avoiding nonessential indoor spaces, increasing testing, prompt quarantine of exposed persons, safeguarding those at increased risk,

protecting essential workers, postponing travel, enhancing ventilation and hand hygiene, and achieving widespread COVID-19 vaccination coverage. To read more, see [Summary of Guidance for Public Health Strategies to Address High Levels of Community Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and Related Deaths, December 2020](#).

In the News:

Dec 8, 2020 -- [Rural Counties Face 5th Straight Week of Record Number of COVID-19 Deaths](#): Analysis of new COVID-19 infection rates from November 29-December 5, 2020 finds that more than 3,000 people from rural counties died from COVID-19-related causes in the one-week period, marking the fifth consecutive week of a record-setting number of fatalities. 94 percent of rural counties were identified as red zones, with infections of more than 100 new cases per 100,000 residents.

Dec 7, 2020 -- [HHS Publishes COVID-19 Hospital Facility-Level Data](#): The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released new hospital COVID-19 capacity data at the facility level. The new data aggregates daily hospital reports into a "week at a time" picture to protect patient privacy, while providing a view of how COVID-19 is impacting local communities across the country.

Dec 7, 2020 -- [In Rural Communities, COVID-19 Increases Healthy Development Challenges for Children of Color](#): Describes how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected Black, Latinx, and American Indian families and communities, especially in rural areas. Includes a snapshot of national COVID-19 death rates in early August that shows how severely rural communities of color were impacted by the virus, discusses the need for policies and programs that provide healthy and equitable living conditions for rural children of color.

Dec 6, 2020 -- [Amid COVID-19 Surge, Rural Mississippi Hospital Verges On Full Capacity](#): Podcast interview with the CEO of Winston Medical Center in rural Mississippi on COVID-19 and its impact on rural hospitals. Describes how Thanksgiving travel and the cooler weather has likely led to an increase in COVID-19 infections, discusses capacity and staffing issues hospitals are experiencing and how this impacts all patients, not just those with COVID-19.

Dec 3, 2020 -- [HHS Amends PREP Act Declaration, Including to Expand Access to COVID-19 Countermeasures Via Telehealth](#): The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a fourth amendment to the Declaration under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP Act). The amendment aims to expand access to important services via telehealth, increase availability of authorized PPE, and make it easier to administer COVID-19 vaccines.

Dec 3, 2020 -- [In Rural Washington, a Small County Gets Ahead of the Curve for Vaccination Planning](#): Features Ferry County Health system in rural Washington, which constructed two

outbuildings for COVID-19 testing and purchased specialized freezers to store the vaccines when they become available. Describes how rural facilities may face a disadvantage in receiving vaccines if the distribution plan is based on population size, but Ferry County Health is confident they will receive the vaccines with the necessary storage.

Dec 1, 2020 -- [Trump Administration Finalizes Permanent Expansion of Medicare Telehealth Services and Improved Payment for Time Doctors Spend with Patients](#): The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released the annual Physician Fee Schedule (PFS) final rule, increasing payments to physicians and practitioners for the additional time they spend with patients, especially those with chronic conditions. This final rule adds more than 60 services to the Medicare telehealth list that will continue to be covered beyond the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Webinar Opportunity:

[The Hidden Farm Crisis: Chronic Stress and Mental Health in Rural Communities](#): **12 -1 pm CST Tuesday, December 15, 2020.** Rural communities often lack access to health services. This barrier, along with cultural expectations of self-sufficiency, isolation, financial strain, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased stress on communities that were already ill-equipped to cope. In this session, we will discuss these concerns, how the extension system is equipping farmers and their communities, and what we all gain from improved rural community health.

[CMS-CDC Fundamentals of COVID-19 Prevention for Nursing Home Management Live Q&A Sessions](#): **3 - 4 pm CST Thursday, January 7, 2020.** Held with CMS and the CDC twice a month on Thursdays at 3 p.m. to help keep nursing home teams on track with their training. [Sign up to receive training updates](#), including additional resources and tools!