

February 26, 2021

## **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](https://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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The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) announces the launch of [Vaccinate.Iowa.gov](https://www.vaccinate.iowa.gov), a new website that provides information about vaccine priority populations and eligibility, resources available for Iowans age 65 and older, and answers to frequently asked questions about vaccine. The site also hosts a locator tool where users can enter their zip code to find vaccine providers near them. Once a provider is selected, appointment scheduling will be done through the provider's website or scheduling platform. Information on the site will be updated regularly and site content can be translated into multiple languages.

To help older Iowans navigate the scheduling process, IDPH is partnering with 211 to provide a dedicated team of vaccine navigators who will schedule appointments for Iowans age 65 and older who are unable to do so because of technology barriers. This 211 vaccine navigator service will be available starting the week of March 8.

As of today, Iowa has administered 626,947 vaccines. More vaccine administration information is available [here](#).

We encourage Iowans to remain patient as more vaccine arrives in the weeks and months ahead. It is also critical to continue practicing the mitigation measures that can slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

- Wear a mask or face covering
- Practice social distancing with those outside your household
- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water
- Stay home if you feel sick
- Get tested if you are exposed to, or have symptoms of COVID-19
- Get a COVID-19 vaccine when you are eligible

## **Resources:**

**The Association of Social Determinants of Health with COVID-19 Mortality in Rural and Urban Counties:** Explores how social determinants of health (SDOH) affect COVID-19 mortality in rural and urban areas. Compares rural and urban rates of COVID-19 mortality by patient characteristics, such as race, age, and gender; comorbidities, such as smoking, diabetes, and HIV; and economic stability, such as unemployment and income, among other factors. To read more, see [The Association of Social Determinants of Health with COVID-19 Mortality in Rural and Urban Counties](#).

**COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Toolkit for Health Centers:** Resources to help health centers build confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines. Includes key messages for communicating with patients and answers to frequently asked questions. Also provides sample social media posts, a press release template, a radio public service announcement example, waiting room posters, and more. To read more, see [COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Toolkit for Health Centers](#).

**COVID-19 Vaccine Update:** Webcast presenting basic information about the logistics of administering the COVID-19 vaccine. Reviews the history of messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine over the last 30 years and recent advances that have enabled the vaccine to be used in humans. Examines data from Phase 3 clinical trials of the two vaccines that have been issued Emergency Use Authorization, and describes the most common side effects and precautions that should be taken to maintain patient safety during vaccination. To read more, see [COVID-19 Vaccine Update](#).

**Telemedicine for Tobacco Cessation and Prevention to Combat COVID-19 Morbidity and Mortality in Rural Areas:** Discusses the use of telehealth to initiate tobacco cessation programs in rural areas as a means of limiting comorbidity and mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlights the rates of tobacco use in rural areas by type and compares rates to urban areas. Explores several examples of programs using telemedicine to implement successful models of tobacco cessation treatment. To read more, see [Telemedicine for Tobacco Cessation and Prevention to Combat COVID-19 Morbidity and Mortality in Rural Areas](#).

**VaccineFinder: Helping People Find Information about COVID-19 Vaccine Providers, and Scheduling an Appointment to Get Vaccinated:** Guidance for healthcare providers on how to share information on vaccination locations and vaccine availability via [VaccineFinder](#). To read more, see [VaccineFinder: Helping People Find Information about COVID-19 Vaccine Providers, and Scheduling an Appointment to Get Vaccinated](#).

## **In the News:**

Feb 23, 2021 -- [A Rural Remedy to Health Care Access](#): Features Project ECHO, a telementoring program created by a gastroenterologist in New Mexico, that connects specialists with physicians in rural areas and those working at state prisons to treat cases of hepatitis C through remote sessions. Describes how the program expanded to treat other health conditions in various states and adapted to address challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Feb 23, 2021 -- [Rural Death Rate from COVID-19 Falls by a Third](#): Analyzes new COVID-19 infection and death rates between February 14-20, 2021 and finds that the number of

COVID-related deaths in rural America dropped by a third, the most significant decline in the rural death rate in more than a month. Additionally, the rate of new infections last week fell by about 30 percent in both metropolitan and rural counties.

Feb 19, 2021 -- [To Vaccinate Veterans, Health Care Workers Must Cross Mountains, Plains and Tundra](#): Highlights efforts by healthcare workers to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to veterans in rural and hard-to-reach areas across the country. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) sent doses by plane to rural Montana and partnered with tribal healthcare organizations to reach veterans in rural Alaska.

Feb 19, 2021 -- [Why Native Americans Are Getting COVID-19 Vaccines Faster](#): Highlights Rosebud Sioux Tribe's COVID-19 vaccine rollout efforts in South Dakota and their decision to receive the vaccines from the Indian Health Service (IHS) instead of the state. Discusses how the IHS centralized system has aided in distribution across Indian Country.

Feb 18, 2021 -- [COVID-19 Converges with the Opioid Epidemic: Challenges for Pregnant and Postpartum Women with Opioid Use Disorder](#): Blog post discusses opioid use and misuse during pregnancy and the resulting health consequences for mothers and infants, barriers to care for pregnant and postpartum women with opioid use disorder (OUD), and how the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating challenges. Describes the disparities that exist in rural areas and recommends policies that increase access to virtual care, OUD treatment, and Medicaid coverage.

Feb 18, 2021 -- [COVID-19 Is Pushing Struggling Rural Hospitals to the Brink](#): The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated financial issues for rural hospitals, leaving many in less populated regions at risk for closing. Discusses how federal support and other financial aid has enabled rural hospitals to continue operating, but experts fear that the support could obscure the dire financial picture many of them face.