



# NEWS RELEASE

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July 27, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **COVID-19 PANDEMIC UPDATE. WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

Sterling, Colo. – July 27, 2022: Things continue to change with COVID-19 and while it is still considered a pandemic, we are definitely in a transitional phase. This week COVID-19 case numbers in our six-county health district are higher than they were a year ago. We are also seeing a slow increase in COVID-19 cases after a significant drop earlier in the year. This is likely from a series of variants, led recently by the highly contagious new Omicron BA.5 variant, and may continue to rise throughout the fall and winter if the same trend is repeated from last year. While Omicron BA.5 is highly transmissible and more immune-evasive, it also seems to have less serious symptoms than its predecessors. This is encouraging, but it's also good to be mindful that getting sick with what is considered a "mild case" can still feel pretty severe.

Currently, the COVID-19 Pandemic is moving out of an accelerated infectious phase into a more controllable stage where we are able to maintain new normalcy. Part of this new normalcy does include taking preventative measures by practicing good hygiene, at times wearing masks in public, and in some cases avoiding crowds. Also, we should follow guidance, that if exposed, to quarantine and wear a mask even if up-to-date with vaccines, and to continue to monitor for symptoms. Testing will also remain important to

identify the illness, guide individuals on whether to seek medical treatment, and make decisions on whether to self-isolate, as well as with surveillance of community exposure.

At the end of June, state-sponsored community PCR testing in northeast Colorado ended. Even though this community testing is not available, it is still critical to identify if you have contracted COVID-19 to determine if treatment is appropriate and to understand the prevalence of the disease in our area. We encourage people who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive, or if they think they may have COVID-19 themselves, to get tested whether at a clinic, doctor's office, or with a rapid self-test at home.

Self-tests for COVID-19 give rapid results and can be taken at home, by anyone regardless of your vaccination status or whether or not you have symptoms. They can be found for sale at most pharmacies, big box stores, and grocery stores. Although some can be costly, most health insurance companies offer reimbursement. There are several ways to get FREE self-tests. Order online at <https://www.covid.gov/tests> and, locally for residents of northeast Colorado, tests can be picked up at these public libraries:

- Akron Public Library
- Burlington Public Library
- East Morgan County Library District in Brush
- Flagler Public Library
- Fort Morgan Public Library
- Julesburg Public Library
- Sterling Public Library
- Wray Public Library

To see all test site locations, visit <https://covid19.colorado.gov/testing>. However, do keep in mind that the rapid at-home tests may not be accepted for international travel. It is recommended to check with your airline and destination for local requirements.

If you test positive, it is important to take appropriate action by contacting Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD). While we are not currently doing contact tracing and case investigation for general cases, we can offer good information, guidance, and advice to patients about symptoms, quarantine or isolation, and treatment options. Additionally, reporting test results will allow us to more accurately track the state of the disease in our area, help local hospitals to predict healthcare needs, and give policymakers information to guide their decisions.

COVID-19 will more than likely continue to be with us for the foreseeable future and exposure may increase as we move indoors for colder weather. Therefore, to maintain control over COVID-19, we must continue to take preventative measures, monitor for symptoms, and test if you feel ill or think you may have been exposed. If you do test positive, contact NCHD at 877-795-0646.

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