

KIT CARSON COUNTY DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

PRESS RELEASE

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KIT CARSON COUNTY COVID RESPONSE LEVEL ORANGE CONTINUES

The Kit Carson County Department of Public Health and Environment along with county, city, school and healthcare leaders agreed at a meeting on November 4, 2020, that COVID-related capacity issues had risen to the point where it was necessary to move the county to Level Orange on the COVID Dial. The county had been operating at Level Yellow (caution) during the previous 2 weeks. Level Yellow had very little impact on how the county operates and decreased county business, church and gathering size to 50% of capacity.

A sudden rise in COVID cases and pressure on both the local healthcare system and local critical infrastructure that occurred in the last two weeks of October, with a positivity rate of 14% prompted the move to the next level of response. Level Orange commenced on November 9th. At Level Orange, all businesses (non-essential and essential), gathering sizes, churches, and restaurants are limited to 25% operational capacity. Businesses, churches and restaurants have been advised to modify operations for a period of two weeks in an attempt to slow the incidence of COVID in the community. This level will remain in place through November 23rd when it will be reassessed and the county capacity will be evaluated. If things don't improve, Level Orange will be extended an additional two weeks and then reevaluated again. The intent of this move is to relieve the incredible pressure on the healthcare system (including medical clinics and the hospital) so that it can be fully operational. The healthcare system in Kit Carson County has its capacity limitations. COVID is not the only thing that providers address on a daily basis, and it is extremely important to maintain the ability to take care other needs besides COVID.

The Kit Carson County November positivity rate in the first week rose to 25% of all individuals who were tested. An "acceptable" rate is 5%. "Acceptable" means that the prevalence of disease in the community does not pose a threat to the ability to care for COVID related illness as well as routine medical care. The local hospital is a Critical Access Hospital and does not have the ability to care for critically ill patients for longer than it takes to get them transferred out. In addition to local capacity problems, the Colorado hospital system has been overwhelmed and over 80% of all ICU beds are now occupied, making it very difficult to get folks sent out from our hospital. This creates a very difficult situation for local healthcare providers and for the patients and families who seek life-saving critical care. If the current trend continues, it is anticipated by State officials, that ICU capacity in the entire state of Colorado will no longer be able to address the need.

In addition to the healthcare capacity issues that are now at a dangerous level, testing capability has become more difficult as well. Kit Carson County only has one rapid test analyzer (called the ID Now), that is shared between the hospital and public health. This analyzer has its capacity limitations, as does

the hospital lab. Local healthcare providers want the rapid test to be reserved for only those who truly need same-day identification of COVID so that immediate and appropriate care can be provided. In an effort to increase testing capacity and decrease the demand on using the ID Now, the health department has procured additional testing instruments that will extend our ability to get test results faster than if we had to send them out to the State lab. One of the tests that are now being offered is an oral swab called "Curative". This test takes 3-4 days to get test results back. The results are texted or emailed directly to the person being tested. While 3-4 days seems like longer than is ideal, if tests are sent to the State Lab, it takes as long as 7-10 days to get results back. In addition to Curative, a shipment of "Binax Now" was received yesterday. Test results are received within 15 minutes. This test would be ideal for those who require a test to return to work, or for those who are mildly symptomatic. Binax is not as sensitive as the ID Now or Curative tests, but does expand our testing capacity a great deal. Public Health does testing 5 days a week by appointment. To set up an appointment, call 719-346-7158, and we would be happy to get you taken care of.

So, what can each of us do to help our community? The health department contacts each and every positive case and interviews them. A common theme in the interview is that most people don't think their symptoms were anything to worry about. They chalked it up to thinking they were just getting a cold or sinus infection. This is what COVID feels like when a person starts getting ill. The mild symptoms become more problematic over time. As a community, we all need to take note of these subtle warning signs of illness and stay home from work or school when they occur. Countless numbers of illnesses could be prevented and disruptions to schools and businesses could be avoided if everyone does their part to keep from spreading the virus any further. With the additional testing capacity that the health department has, getting tested to rule-out COVID is easy and fast.

It is imperative that we all take this threat to our community seriously. 100% of the schools in our county have had disruptions to in-person learning; churches can now only allow 50 people at a time to worship. We've lost daycare providers and meals for our seniors. Only you, the people of Kit Carson County, can turn the tide and beat this virus. Thanks to everyone who is doing their part to get this under control and all of us back to the life we love.

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