



Erie County
Department of
Health



Public Health
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MEDIA RELEASE

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ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ADDRESSES RISE IN NEW COVID-19 CASES

Epidemiology data offers transmission sources based on case investigations

ERIE COUNTY, NY – The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) is offering an analysis on recent increases in new daily COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Erie County residents.

ECDOH and its epidemiology team look closely at COVID test results and case investigation reports on a daily basis. For case investigations, contact tracers are linked to a New York State system that allows the team to look for groupings or clusters within businesses, schools, events and activities that would require intervention beyond isolation and quarantine. The office of epidemiology also looks for patterns in case data by municipality and in smaller areas as needed. Interventions by our Department might include targeted point-of-care diagnostic testing, notices to certain towns or neighborhoods to draw attention to a rise in local cases, or public announcements of exposure in cases where close contacts cannot be identified and notified.

Each new case confirmed by ECDOH has a number of close contacts who have been exposed and may develop disease. And each day that large numbers of new cases are confirmed, there are hundreds more people who have been exposed – each of whom has to quarantine and is at risk of developing disease. “A small number of cases can turn into a significant concern quickly,” **explained Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale Burstein**. “That’s why the measures we are taking to reduce opportunities for COVID transmission are so crucial, and they have to continue.”

As for hospitalizations within Erie County and Western New York, past experience shows that inpatient numbers follow trends of new cases. As daily case numbers increase, a proportion of those cases will be hospitalized at some point. Based on increasing numbers of new cases, hospitalization numbers may continue to creep up. Those hospitalizations are not just in older people. For the most recent data available for October 12, 18 of the 45 individuals (40%) hospitalized with COVID-19 in Erie County hospitals were under 65 years old. Dr. Burstein is in regular contact with partners at local hospitals on these points.

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Factors that are driving new cases in Erie County include:

- **Asymptomatic cases** who transmit the disease without knowing they are infectious. A recent review by ECDOH of several weeks' worth of cases showed that more than one-third of cases did not report having COVID symptoms.
- **Travel outside the area.** This includes individuals who return to Erie County from states that are on the NYS Travel Advisory list, and other areas that are experiencing sustained community transmission of COVID-19. It also includes individuals who travel to regional or national events, as those individuals may come in contact with participants from high-risk states.
- **Congregate living settings** and households with large families or college-age groups, and an unwillingness or inability to isolate or quarantine to prevent transmission within that household.
- **Group activities, social gatherings and organized sports** where participants are not wearing masks or distancing appropriately.
- **Access to testing:** ECDOH is working to expand capacity to provide diagnostic COVID tests, and these tests are offered at no cost. With support from NYSDOH, point-of-care testing is available for symptomatic p-12 students and symptomatic school staff in order to get them back to school and work if they have been excluded because of COVID-like symptoms. But most diagnostic tests do not give immediate results, and health insurance companies' reluctance to cover diagnostic testing for asymptomatic people can be a barrier for testing.
- **Prevention fatigue:** Recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions (wearing face masks, frequent handwashing, cleaning high-touch surfaces, physical distancing) have become part of many people's everyday routines. Those behaviors have to continue. People who disregard those recommendations, intentionally or unintentionally, are taking risks with their health and the health of those around them.

Erie County's COVID response operations are working on all fronts to encourage preventive behaviors, protect vulnerable populations, identify new cases quickly, break the chains of transmission, and prevent sustained community transmission. ECDOH is also planning for the reality of a winter flu season alongside a global pandemic.

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For more information:

- Erie County Department of Health, COVID-19: www.erie.gov/covid19
- Erie County COVID-19 Information Line – schedule a diagnostic test: (716) 858-2929
- Erie County COVID-19 Test Sites: www.erie.gov/covidtestsites

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