



**Quad Cities COVID-19 Coalition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 22, 2020**

Current COVID-19 case count

Scott County – Total of 4,172
Total deaths in Scott County: 37

Rock Island County – 53 new cases since Wednesday; total of 3,939
Currently in hospital: 29
Total deaths in Rock Island County: 98
Newly reported death: A man in his 80s who died at his home.

“We are saddened to report another death today,” said Nita Ludwig, administrator of the Rock Island County Health Department. “We send our sympathies to his friends and family.”

Today’s call

A video recording of today’s media briefing can be found at
<https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/covid19/news>

Numbers alone don’t tell pandemic’s story

Remarks from Edward Rivers, director, Scott County Health Department

From the very beginning of the pandemic, a strong focus has been placed on the data that describes the spread of COVID-19. Data is compiled on positive cases, county-wide positivity, deaths, long term care outbreaks, hospital beds, ventilators, etc.

However, numbers alone don’t provide us a full picture of the pandemic taking place in our community. Much of the information we gather is through interviews conducted with individuals who have tested positive as well as their close contacts. We are able to interview more than 95 percent of cases reported in our county and contacts they each may have. Each interview helps us determine the types of symptoms people are experiencing and the interactions they are having in the community. From time to time, the interviews identify similar activities or events, indicating whether or not the public health guidance we share is being heeded.

Today, Nita and I are joined by a staff member from each of our departments who participate in our contact tracing activities. We have invited them to share some information about the process and provide some insight into tells us about the spread of COVID-19 in the Quad Cities.

Contact tracing basis of public health

Remarks from Debbie Freiburg, contact tracer at the Rock Island County Health Department

I've been a nurse my whole adult life. I spent most of my career working with young cancer patients. When I was a young nurse, most of our patients died. By the time I retired, most kids recovered and were cancer free years later. Science made this possible.

I've been helping at the Rock Island County Health Department since March doing contract tracing. Before the pandemic began, few people know the term "contact tracing," but it really is the basis of scientifically proven public health infection control. Contact tracing for COVID-19 typically involves:

- Interviewing people with COVID-19 to identify everyone they had close contact with during the time they may have been infectious
- Notifying contacts of their potential exposure
- Referring contacts for testing
- Monitoring contacts for signs and symptoms of COVID-19

For the most part, the people I talk to have been cooperative. But I've been yelled at. I've been hung up on. I've been cussed at. And those are just the people who pick up the phone. I leave many messages that never are returned. It's hard not to feel defeated. Public health is not the enemy. We must not give into pandemic fatigue.

The people I talk to seem to not understand how their individual actions impact the entire community. We've linked dozens of cases to two large weddings this fall. The state restricts weddings to 50 people, but these gatherings were much larger than that.

We've seen many cases pop up in Rock Island County of people who "took a break" from COVID in Iowa, where the positivity is 20 percent and safety protocols are basically nonexistent.

Hundreds of cases have started as a night out at a bar and spread to hundreds more. One person told me that "we all knew each other, so we didn't wear masks." That's not safe. At least one person in that group was positive and spread it to many friends.

I talked with a woman who went to brunch at a restaurant with six other friends. They said they were "good" and wore their masks, except when they were eating and drinking. They all got sick.

I talked with one man whose wife was positive, and he got sick, too. The day I talked with him, he said he was feeling better. I then talked to his son a couple of days later as a contact. The son told me his dad had died the night before in the hospital. The family had to say goodbye to him over the phone.

We as contact tracers are not trying to invade your privacy. We are not doing this to be “nosy.” We’re trying to control a global pandemic, with the only tools we have:

- Tracing infections and urging people to
 - Wear a mask
 - Watch their distance
 - Wash their hands
 - Stay home when they are sick
 - Stay home when they are told they are a contact

Until scientists find a vaccine or effective treatment — and I believe they will — we must use the tools we have. Please help us.

Identifying contacts vital to stopping virus’ spread

Remarks from Leah Kroeger, contact tracer for the Scott County Health Department

I am not a nurse and I don’t possess any previous contact tracing experience. By trade, I am a dental hygienist, while my training has provided me with a solid science background and skills in asking questions about patient’s health, I was not expecting to use those skills to become a contact tracer nor for a pandemic to say the least. However, COVID-19 has lead our department to have all hands on deck.

Stopping the spread of infectious diseases is the basis of public health. The most effective tool we have is social distancing. We need to separate those who are sick from those who are not and separate those who were around someone who was sick to ensure they do not continue to spread the virus.

Many positive cases we interview are asymptomatic, meaning they feel fine and may only have gotten tested because they were exposed. We know COVID-19 is in our community and that masks and keeping physical distance help reduce the spread of the virus. So when you must go out, assume everyone you encounter is positive. There is no “normal” in 2020. Sadly, COVID-19 looks like any other illness we typically encounter, especially this time of the year. When you do not feel well, it is important that you stay home.

The mask and social distancing guidelines for COVID-19 exist to help you, not hinder you. That is the reason why we ask if you were wearing masks and who you were closer than 6 feet from for more than 15 minutes with. These answers matter and they help us determine when and if a quarantine is needed. So please wear your mask and please keep your distance from others outside of your household. It will make the difference.

If you’ve tested positive for COVID-19, you will receive a call from public health. Please, please, please share your close contacts with us. Reducing the spread will only work if we can identify and separate those who were exposed so that they don’t unintentionally spread the virus to others.

In case there are misconceptions about what it means to tell us who your contacts are, I'll explain what a contact can expect when we give them a call:

- We will introduce ourselves and let them know that they were identified as a close contact to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. We encourage people who are positive to inform their contacts and let them know we will be calling!
- We review the signs and symptoms to look for should they develop COVID-19 as a result of the exposure they had.
- We provide them with guidance regarding their 14-day quarantine and how that timeline may change if they develop symptoms.
- However, one of the most important parts of the call is that we offer to answer any questions or concerns they may have about COVID-19 and let them know we are always available if future questions arise.

In a perfect world, we would call a positive case and they would tell us they have no close contacts who need to quarantine – because they've been social distancing and masking. The more often this would happen, the slower the spread of the virus, and the sooner we can begin to recover from COVID-19 as a community.

However, in the world we are currently living in, identifying close contacts is vital to helping us stop the spread.

Lastly, remember that the contact tracer that gives you a phone call is a member of your community, doing their best to keep you and your family safe. We all live in this community and care for our neighbors and friends. We get to know you during these phone calls and think about you and your recovery long after. We are here to help and are grateful for your cooperation!

More information

- <https://www.scottcountyiowa.gov/health/post/do-masks-prevent-covid-19>
- <https://togetherqc.com/2020/10/mask-mandate-local-initiative/>
- www.TogetherQC.com
- coronavirus.iowa.gov
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=2>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/countymetrics?county=Rock%20Island>
- <https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/facilities/Pages/Covid19Response.aspx>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/long-term-care-facility-outbreaks-covid-19>

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