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News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Liane Blanck
262-605-6713

Kenosha County Public Health answers frequently asked questions on COVID-19

In response to recent community questions about COVID-19 — particularly, the Delta variant and vaccine developments — Kenosha County Public Health is providing this Q&A reference for the public.

Kenosha County Health Officer Dr. Jen Freiheit reminds the public that the spread of COVID-19 remains active in the community, and the precautions can and should be taken to minimize health risks associated with the virus.

“Nearly a year and a half into the local response to the pandemic, I know that it is difficult to continue taking many of these precautions, but now is not the time to let our guard down when it comes to protecting ourselves and our families,” Freiheit said. “Vaccination remains the most significant step people can take to protect themselves and others, and social distancing, masking and washing hands frequently are also tools we should continue using.”

Following are answers to recent, frequently asked questions:

Q: What is the current COVID-19 situation in Kenosha County?

A: As of Friday, Sept. 3, Kenosha and most other Wisconsin counties and all counties in Illinois are listed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as having a high level of community transmission. This information is updated regularly at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>.

Kenosha County has gone from averaging five new cases per day on July 1 to averaging nearly 50 cases per day as of late August (7-day averages). This is after daily cases had dropped steadily from mid-April to late June.

The recent increase in cases coincides with the spread of the Delta variant, which has demonstrated itself to be more highly transmissible than earlier forms of COVID-19. The CDC estimates that a person infected with the original COVID-19 strain would infect two additional people on average, a person infected with the Delta variant would infect five additional people on average.

Q: With breakthrough cases on the rise, should I bother to get vaccinated?

A: Yes, absolutely. While the Delta variant has demonstrated its transmissibility to those who are fully vaccinated, the CDC reports the greatest risk of transmission is among unvaccinated people who are much more likely to contract and therefore transmit the virus. The CDC also reports substantially lower risk of hospitalization and death for fully vaccinated people even if they do contract the virus.

And while fully vaccinated people with Delta variant breakthrough infections can spread the virus to others, vaccinated people appear to be infectious for a shorter period.

Put simply, vaccination continues to be a safe, easily accessible way to protect yourself from the effects of COVID-19, and to limit its spread. Information about where you can get vaccinated locally remains available on the Kenosha County COVID-19 Response Hub webpage, at www.kenoshacounty.org/covid-19.

Q: Will I really get paid if I get vaccinated?

A: Yes. Under a program that the State of Wisconsin announced recently, Wisconsin residents who get their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine between Aug. 20 and Sept. 19 are eligible to receive a \$100 Visa gift card. This is being funded with federal COVID-19 relief dollars.

Those who receive their first dose during this window must fill out an online form to receive the gift card. More information about this program is available at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/100.htm>.

Q: Is it safe to be vaccinated if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

A: Yes. Research shows that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for pregnant and breastfeeding people.

Pregnant people are more likely to get severely sick from COVID-19 compared with non-pregnant people, and pregnant people with COVID-19 are at a higher risk for pregnancy

complications. If you are fully vaccinated, your chance of getting severely sick or hospitalized is much lower than if you are not fully vaccinated.

More details on this from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services are available here: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02977.pdf>.

Q: I'm very healthy — I eat healthy food, I exercise, and I don't have any underlying medical conditions. Why would I need to get vaccinated?

A: Studies have indicated even healthy people are at risk, even if less risk, of severe disease and death from COVID-19. Furthermore, there is a risk of long-term effects from COVID-19, such as organ damage, even in younger, healthier people.

Also significant, healthy people can still be infected with COVID-19 and pass it on symptomatically or asymptotically to family, friends and others who may have a greater risk of severe complications.

Q: Which vaccine is the best? Are any of them unsafe?

A: A report published by Yale Medicine determined that the three varieties currently being administered in the United States — Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson — all have unique traits, but all offer strong protection against severe disease.

The Pfizer vaccine last month became the first variety to receive full FDA approval for people ages 16 and older, while an emergency use authorization remains in effect for people ages 12-17. Emergency use authorizations also remain in place for the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines for people 18 or older.

Severe side effects have been found to be extremely rare with all three of the vaccines.

You can read the full Yale Medicine report at <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/covid-19-vaccine-comparison>.

Q: When will kids under 12 be able to get vaccinated?

A: Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a member of Pfizer's board of directors, told CNBC on Monday, Sept. 1, that he expects the Pfizer vaccine to be cleared for use in children ages 5 to 11 in late fall or early winter this year.

This expectation is in line with recent remarks from White House Chief Medical Advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci, CNBC reported.

Q: Where can I get vaccinated if I have to be at work all day during the week?

A: Many local providers are offering vaccinations on weekends and after regular business hours. A list of providers and links to their reservation systems is at www.kenoshacounty.org/covid-19.

Q: I've been vaccinated. Do I need a booster, and when can I get it?

A: People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised are recommended to get an additional dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine at least 28 days after their initial two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series.

People who are immunocompromised include those who have been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood, those who are taking medicine to suppress the immune system after an organ or stem cell transplant, people with moderate or severe primary immunodeficiencies, those with advanced or untreated HIV infection, and those in active treatment with other drugs that may suppress your immune response.

Individuals who are in these categories are encouraged to consult with their health care provider about whether they need to receive an additional dose.

(Note: An additional dose for people who received the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine is not recommended at this time because of limited data; the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are monitoring the data and will make recommendations as needed.)

The CDC does not recommend additional doses for any other population at this time, although the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced a plan to recommend booster shots for all later this fall. More details will be announced at a future date, after federal authorities review data further.

More information about additional vaccine doses are available at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/vaccine-dose.htm> and at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>.

Q: What is your current recommendation on the wearing of face masks?

A: The CDC currently advises that people age 2 and over, regardless of vaccination status, should wear a mask indoors in public in areas with a substantial or high level of public transmission of the virus. This includes Kenosha County at this time.

This is intended to maximize protection from the Delta variant and to prevent possibly spreading it to others.

In schools, Kenosha County Public Health is recommending the implementation of universal masking requirements for teachers, staff, students and visitors in all education systems, regardless of vaccination status. This includes K-12 schools and institutions of higher education.

This recommendation comes as the population of those under age 12 remains ineligible for vaccination.

Q: How can I stay informed about COVID-19 in our community?

A: The Kenosha County COVID-19 Response Hub webpage, at www.kenoshacounty.org/covid-19, includes dashboards detailing case counts, hospitalizations and vaccination rates locally.

Timely information is also shared on the Kenosha County Public Health Facebook page, at www.facebook.com/KenoshaCountyPublicHealth.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services also has several county-level graphs on its COVID-19 data hub at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/county.htm>.

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