This Month in Public Health

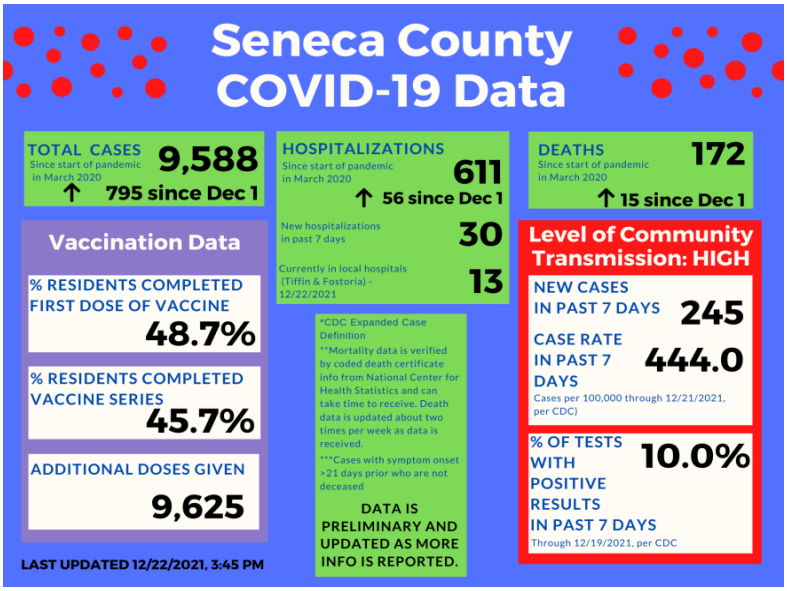
in Seneca County

December 23, 2021, Edition

The Current Status of COVID-19 in Seneca County and Beyond

This graphic reflects data available Dec 22, 2021.

- New research reveals that **in the absence of a vaccination program, there would have been approximately 1.1 million additional COVID-19 deaths and more than 10.3 million additional COVID-19 hospitalizations in the U.S. by November 2021!** (Over 807,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, but there would have been nearly 2,000,000 deaths if no COVID-19 vaccines were yet available.) Source: *The U.S. COVID-19 Vaccination Program at One Year: How Many Deaths and Hospitalizations Were Averted? | Commonwealth Fund*
- At our current rate, we're **likely to surpass 1,100 new cases for the month of December**. We had a similar number of new cases last month (1,111).
- Our highest case counts were in Nov 2020 (1,439 new cases) and Dec 2020 (1,272 new cases). It's disheartening to see our current number of new cases being so similar, because so many have chosen not to be vaccinated.
- We anticipate **at least 80 Seneca County residents being hospitalized for COVID-19 this month;** 73 residents were hospitalized last month. Hospitalizations typically start increasing several weeks after case rates go up. Since the number of new cases is probably going to climb further due to the quickly-spreading Omicron variant, local hospitalizations are likely to remain high for the foreseeable future.



- Everyone will face much longer waits for medical care due to hospitals being stretched beyond capacity and resources get more and more taxed. **Bed availability is very limited, resulting in emergency room patients or individuals needing transfer to another hospital waiting for hours or sometime days to be admitted.**
  - There were 549 COVID-positive patients in northwest Ohio hospitals yesterday; 1 in 5 in-patients is COVID +.
  - In Seneca County, ~55% of patients in the ICU during the past week were COVID-positive.
- **Altered standards of care may become necessary. "**Altered standards of care" describe the level of health care that is acceptable when adequate resources are not available to meet the usual standard of care provided by health care professionals. Priority for limited medical resources would be based upon the allocation of scarce resources to maximize the number of lives saved.

What Can We Do?

We're still learning more about Omicron, but it's definitely more contagious than previous variants. Combining multiple layers of protection (highlighted below) will help us all avoid infection.

GET VACCINATED!

- Early clinical trials indicated that mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) were ~95% effective in preventing serious illness from COVID-19, and Ohio data supports this. **From January 1, 2021, to December 15, 2021, 94.4% of those hospitalized for COVID-19 in Ohio have been unvaccinated. Among COVID-19 deaths in 2021, 95.4% were unvaccinated.**
- If you're not vaccinated yet, get started this week! **CDC recently updated its recommendations, indicating that people should get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine rather than the Johnson & Johnson vaccine** (except in very limited situations) due to their greater effectiveness.

- **All vaccinated Seneca County residents ages 18 and older are now eligible and strongly encouraged to get a booster dose to gain added protection against serious outcomes from COVID-19 and to maximize ongoing protection against COVID-19 infection.** You're eligible if it's been 2 months since you got a shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine or 6 months since you finished the two-dose series of Pfizer or Moderna.
- **There are multiple COVID-19 vaccine providers in Seneca County-** Seneca County General Health District; local retail pharmacies like CVS, RiteAid, Kroger's, and WalMart; and medical providers like Tiffin Pediatrics Associates, Tiffin Community Health Center, and Community Health Services in Fostoria. Not all vaccine providers have all types of COVID-19 vaccine, and most require an appointment. Find out more at https://gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov/ or https://www.vaccines.gov. To schedule an appointment at the Health District, call (419) 447-3691, ext 6333.

WEAR A MASK (OVER YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE) INDOORS, REGARDLESS OF VACCINATION STATUS, IN AREAS WITH SUBSTANTIAL OR HIGH LEVELS OF COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION. Every county in Ohio currently has very high levels of community spread, which means we should all be wearing masks indoors to protect each other. A vaccinated person might also choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of community transmission, particularly if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised, at increased risk for severe disease, or is unvaccinated.

TEST… IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS… HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WHO'S TESTED POSITIVE… BEFORE GOING TO FAMILY GATHERINGS OR LARGE EVENTS. While no one wants to miss the festivities, it's the kind and considerate thing to do so that you don't expose extended family or friends who may be at greater risk of severe COVID-19 illness.

FREE Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Antigen Home Tests are available at Seneca County General Health District, as well as Seneca East and Tiffin-Seneca Public Libraries and Seneca County Emergency Management Agency (EMA). **It's always best to call ahead to make sure tests are available.** DO NOT go to an emergency department for testing unless you truly need emergency care (e.g., trouble breathing, persistent chest pain or pressure).

Two versions of the BinaxNOW test are now available, so pick the one that best fits your needs (if you have a choice).

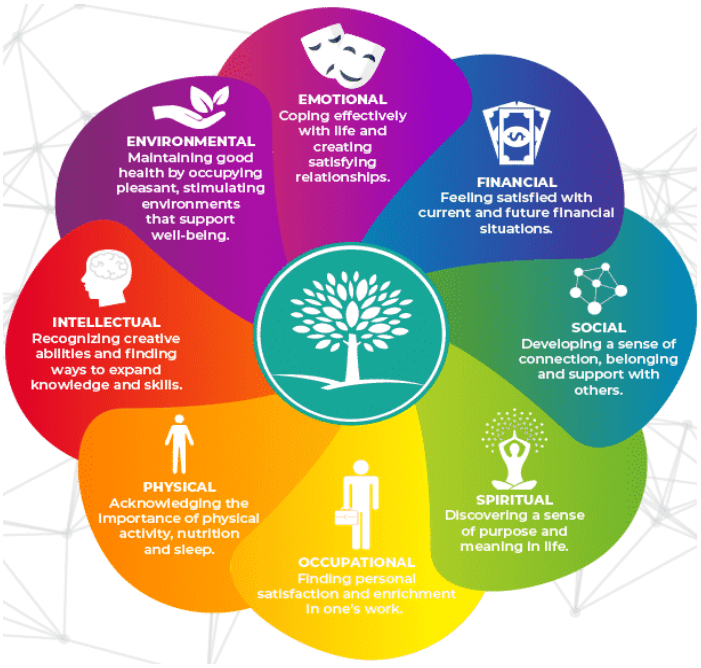
- "Proctored" Test (for those who need to provide formal verification of test results for their school, employer, or airline): This test is done at home under the direct visual supervision of a telehealth provider (so a laptop, tablet, or smart phone is required). There is 1 test in a box.
- Unproctored Test (for those who DON'T need formal verification of their results): This test is done at home without the assistance of a telehealth provider. There are 2 tests per box.

ADD ON THESE ADDITIONAL LAYERS OF PROTECTION, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE NOT VACCINATED:

- ✓ Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 ft from individuals you don't live with.
- ✓ Avoid large gatherings.
- ✓ Get a flu shot.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect surfaces.
- ✓ Stay home if you're sick- regardless of whether it's COVID-19, the flu, common cold, or some other respiratory illness. If you are positive for COVID-19, you need to stay home from school or work for 10 days. You can end your isolation and return to your usual activities when at least 10 days have passes AND you've not had a fever for at least 24 hours (without taking Tylenol or some other fever-reducing medication) AND your other symptoms are improving.

FINALLY, PRACTICE WELLNESS!

"Wellness" is made up of multiple dimensions- social, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, financial, and environmental. Pandemics can disrupt all these aspects of our well-being, because they're all interconnected.



In the spirit of practicing emotional wellness, I'm sharing a portion of ***Five Ways to Take Care of Your Mental Health This Holiday Season*** written by Mental Health First Aid USA:

We all feel stressed from time to time during the holiday season – there is pressure to attend social events, give gifts, travel and more that can take a toll on one's mental health. In fact, a **poll** conducted by the American Psychological Association found that nearly a quarter of Americans report feeling extreme stress during this time of year and 45% would prefer to skip the holidays entirely to avoid the associated stress.

This year may feel especially challenging, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of loved ones, financial stress from lost jobs, and feelings of anxiety because of the uncertainties associated with the pandemic – these are all impacting the way people feel. If you feel anxious about finding a new "normal" this holiday season, that's OK. It's important that you adjust at your own pace and take care of your mental wellbeing along the way. **Here are a few tips from Mental Health First Aid to help you take care of your mental health this holiday season.**

1. **Focus on what you can control.** The pandemic has changed a lot around us, and it's OK if you feel anxious as a result. Control what you can to take care of your physical and mental health. If you are nervous about travel requirements, research them in advance so you feel more prepared. If you're feeling stressed by the media, take a digital break for a few days.
2. **Keep healthy habits.** It's important to keep healthy habits in place no matter your holiday plans. This may include going on a daily walk, getting a good night's rest, or staying hydrated. Taking care of your physical health can help stabilize your mood, reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and improve long-term mental wellbeing.
3. **Make time for yourself.** Spending time with family or friends, especially if you have not seen them in the last few years, can be overwhelming. If you need a moment to yourself, try sneaking away to a quiet room or going for an early morning walk.
4. **Create new traditions.** It may feel challenging to revert to holiday traditions from 2019, and that's OK. Create new traditions that work for you and prioritize your mental wellbeing.
5. **Ask for help if you need it.** If you are feeling especially sad, stressed, anxious, or depressed, ask for **help**. Talk to someone you trust, a mental health professional, or a primary care physician for guidance and support.

Whether you feel excited, nervous, anxious or stressed (or all of these!) about the coming holiday season, you are not alone. By taking small actions each day, you can #BeTheDifference for yourself and make your mental wellbeing a priority. Check out these blogs from Mental Health First Aid for more tips around managing your mental health during the during the holidays:

1. **Staying Grateful in Difficult Times – Mental Health First Aid**
2. **Mental Health During the Holidays: Five Tips to Ease the Struggle – Mental Health First Aid**
3. **How to Support Your Loved One With a Mental Illness During the Holidays – Mental Health First Aid**
4. **Four Tips to Manage Social Anxiety this Holiday Season – Mental Health First Aid**
5. **How to Cope with Physical Distancing During the Holidays – Mental Health First Aid**