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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Whiteside County Health Department Reminds Residents to Take Precautions as Whiteside is to Enter Warning and 2 COVID-19 Variants Have Been Found**

April 1, 2021 – Tomorrow, Whiteside County will be added to IDPH’s list of counties in Warning due to the high number of cases per 100,000 (259 per 100,000) and increasing percentage of adults visiting the Emergency Department with COVID-19 like illnesses (6.4%).

This comes as new COVID-19 cases are once again on the rise. Of the 424 cases announced in March, 306 (72%) have been identified between March 18th and 31st with 192 (45%) being announced in just the last 7 days. This has led to an increase in Whiteside County’s positivity rate. Currently, Whiteside’s 7 day rolling average positivity Rate is 7%, up from 3.1% at the beginning of March. This is the highest Whiteside’s positivity rate has been since the end of January.

In addition to the increasing number of positive cases, IDPH has recently identified 2 COVID-19 variants among Whiteside County residents. The variants which have been identified are B.1.1.7, which was first identified in the United Kingdom, and B.1.429 which was first detected in California. When a virus mutates, the new strain is sometimes referred to as a variant. These mutations can cause changes that allow the virus to spread more easily, induce more serious illness, or reduce the effectiveness of vaccine or other treatments.

The CDC believes the UK variant, B.1.1.7, should have minimal impact on the effectiveness of vaccine, but believed to be more transmissible (approximately 50% higher) and cause more severe illness based on hospitalizations and fatality rates. The increased transmissibility is of significant concern as approximately 84% of Whiteside County residents remain unvaccinated and a reminder of the importance of strictly adhering to recommended preventive measures such as social distancing and masking.

Unfortunately the CDC has indicated that the California variant, B.1.429, has both increased transmissibility (approximately 20% more transmissible) and resistance to the protection offered by vaccination. This potentially puts both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals at risk of infection.

### **Reminders and Recommendations for Keeping Your Community Safe**

The Whiteside County Health Department understands it is common for individuals to travel this time of year, and wants to remind individuals to follow [CDC Travel Guidance](#) both when traveling and [After You Travel](#). Taking protective actions when traveling, and to help limit spread in Whiteside County, is the best protection against the spread of variants, and potential future mutations. Residents can follow a few simple steps, in all of their interactions, to help reduce the chance of contracting or spreading COVID-19. These steps include masking, social distancing, staying home and getting tested when you have symptoms of COVID-19, and getting vaccinated when able.



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CDC After Travel Recommendations can be [found here](#) and are included below.

- [Getting tested](#) with a [viral test](#) 3-5 days after travel **AND stay home and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel.**
  - Even if you test negative, stay home and self-quarantine for the full 7 days.
  - If your test is positive, isolate yourself to protect others from getting infected.
- If you don't get tested, stay home and self-quarantine for 10 days after travel.
- Avoid being around [people who are at increased risk for severe illness](#) for 14 days, whether you get tested or not.

### Masking

As a reminder, masks should be worn by individuals older than 2 years of age, if medically able, whenever you are in a public setting, around people you do not live with. Additionally, everyone in a household should mask if anyone has tested positive for COVID-19. Evidence has repeatedly shown the [effectiveness of masking](#) at lowering transmission of COVID-19. Several studies have shown a 70% reduction in risk provided by masking. Additionally, a recent [CDC MMWR](#) found counties in States that implemented universal masking saw a decrease in daily COVID-19 cases and deaths within 20 days.

The effectiveness of masking is compounded when performed correctly with other mitigation measures such as social distancing and handwashing. Please help do your part by continue to protect yourself and others.

### Saying Home and Getting Tested When You Have Symptoms of COVID-19

As a reminder the symptoms of COVID-19 can be varied and can include any of the following fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea and diarrhea. Individuals who have **any** of these symptoms should avoid others and seek COVID-19 testing. Early identification and isolation of COVID+ individuals reduces the spread.

### Social Distancing

COVID-19 is spread through close contact. At this time, residents should limit face-to-face contact with others when possible. This includes limiting contact when running errands by using curbside pickup and delivery, continuing to use conference calls and video conferencing in workplaces, and keeping distance and staying outdoors when attending events and gatherings. CDC has released updated guidance for fully vaccinated individuals attending small social functions but individuals should continue distancing when at work and in public.

### Please Protect Yourself, Your Family, and Your Community by:

- **Mask-Up:** Covering your nose and mouth with a cloth face covering or surgical mask whenever you are around people who do not live in your household.
- **Back-Up:** Keeping a minimum of 6ft between you and anyone who does not live in your household.
- **Check-Up:** Stay home and seek testing when you have ANY symptoms of COVID-19.
- **Vax-Up:** Getting vaccinated when it is your turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have questions please contact the IDPH COVID-19 hotline at 1-800-889-3931 or reach out to us.

Additional information is also available on the [Illinois's COVID-19](#) and [CDC COVID-19](#) websites.

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