



MEMORANDUM

Date: December 19, 2022

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshner 
County Administrator

Re: **Pandemic Update**

Since the beginning of the pandemic Pima County has experienced 307,309 cases of COVID-19 and 4,092 COVID-19 related deaths. In recent weeks, Pima County and much of the state have seen a surge in COVID-19 cases. (Attachment 1) Just during the month of November, there were 8,463 COVID-19 cases in this community, and last week alone there were 1,648 COVID-19 cases reported. The impact of this latest surge has been evident across our own workforce with 83 employees reporting out with COVID-19 during the first week of December, compared to a low point of only 3 cases the second week of March. This week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting a case rate of 172.92 per 100,000 for the last seven days in Pima County.

Hospital capacity across Pima County and much of the state has been declining as a result of the combined impact of the current COVID-19 surge, a historically severe influenza season, and severe but now improving RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). (Attachment 2) There were 632 COVID-related hospitalizations during the month of November in Pima County. This is the highest number of hospitalizations since the last peak in January 2022 which was 1,159. Overall, Emergency Department visits for COVID-like illness in Pima County hospitals (reporting into the federal syndromic surveillance programs) were about 5 to 8 percent during the last week (similarly influenza-like illness ranged from 5.5 to 7 percent). Although a precise quantitation of COVID-related bed use is not possible following expiration of the Governor's Emergency Declaration, the CDC reports 7 percent of hospital beds and 6.9 percent of ICU beds in use by COVID-19 patients in Pima County.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Pima County has reported 3,409,883 diagnostic COVID-19 tests. Testing in Pima County has increased slightly during the last six weeks. About 9,999 diagnostic tests were performed last week with a diagnostic test positivity at 21 percent the highest it has been since July. Both the total number of tests and the positivity rate are likely to be higher, given the wide distribution and home use of rapid antigen testing, which is not routinely reported.

The COVID-19 Community Level for Pima County this week has improved to Yellow (Medium) Level after three weeks of Red (High) Level based on the most recently CDC risk assessment.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

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Test-to-Treat

On June 23, the Pima County Health Department initiated a low-barrier Test-to-Treat program at our East Clinic. This service, the first of its kind in Arizona, was initially possible due to the collaboration and support of the Federal Emergency Management Administration. This service is now entirely supported by Health Department staff.

Testing and evaluation for anti-viral medication is available through telephone consultation. The service is available Monday through Friday during normal business hours. Starting the second week of August, the Health Department began to directly dispense Paxlovid (one of the anti-virals) as appropriate at this site. There is no cost to the patient for the testing, evaluation, or medication. Thanks to this collaborative effort, however, the Health Department has medically evaluated and identified 2,136 individuals for treatment.

Vaccination

More than 2,256,519 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered to Pima County residents. At this time, 74.5 percent (780,141) of the County has been *fully* vaccinated. Notably, 78.5 percent of the population 5-years and older is now fully vaccinated. Additionally, 181,251 or 18.3 percent of the population has received the latest bivalent booster.

Since vaccine became available, we have documented 82,095 breakthrough infections following complete vaccination. This is 11.3 percent of the fully vaccinated population that have developed subsequent COVID-19 infection. Breakthrough cases result in less severe disease and only 1.95 percent (14,190) of fully vaccinated individuals have required hospitalization, and 0.56 percent (4,092) have died of COVID-19 related illness.

Vaccine, including the bivalent booster, remains abundantly available through retail pharmacies, Federally Qualified Health Centers, other clinical entities, and at our own [Health Department fixed and mobile locations](#).

Conclusion

Pima County like other regions across the U.S. is experiencing elevated numbers of COVID-19 cases. This current surge in combination with increases in respiratory illness due to a serious influenza season that has not yet peaked and elevated levels of RSV, has had an impact on hospital resources. Especially during the holiday season, it is critical that residents continue to protect themselves and each other with vaccination and boosters, staying home when sick, and masking indoors especially for medically vulnerable individuals. Testing and masking for symptomatic individuals, as well as avoiding crowded in-door settings for older and otherwise medically vulnerable individuals continues to be recommended behaviors.

Attachments

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer
Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Pima County Health Department