



## Public Health Advisory Update COVID-19 2021-11

Updated August 17, 2021

This is a rapidly evolving situation. The public health advisory will be updated when critical new information and recommendations are needed.

The Pima County Health Department (PCHD) is providing this important update to the public health advisory issued on July 29, 2021, regarding community spread of COVID-19 and its resulting impacts on area hospital capacity and bed availability in Pima County due to a significant surge in COVID-19 cases.

### Community Public Health Response

It is critical that residents and visitors to Pima County understand the threat that COVID-19 and decreased hospital capacity poses to the public's health and safety. The Pima County Health Department asks the public to help stop community spread of COVID-19 by taking the following steps:

- **Get vaccinated against COVID-19 and flu**
- **Wear a mask when indoors, at schools and in public places**
- Wash your hands frequently
- Limit gathering in public spaces
- Limit travel that is not essential
- Get tested if you have covid-like symptoms
- Isolate for 10 days from others if you test positive
- Quarantine if you are exposed to someone who tests positive

All Pima County residents should take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and their families from COVID-19. When members of the public follow the recommended public health mitigation strategies, Pima County has been able to interrupt the spread of COVID-19, reduce the number of people who are infected, mitigate the development of severe illness, reduce hospitalizations, and prevent deaths. This will enable Pima County to return to a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible.

### Key Facts

Pima County is experiencing HIGH COVID-19 transmission, with over 145 cases per 100,000 population in the week ending August 14, 2021. We have seen a threefold increase in the number of cases in the past two weeks, which requires an urgent community-wide response to protect the public's health.

There have been 122,635 COVID-19 cases diagnosed in Pima County as of August 12, 2021, including an increasing number of cases in K-12 schools in Pima County. The week of Aug. 9-13 saw 281 cases, up 120 from the week of Aug. 2-6. Since July 20, 2021, schools have reported at least 581 cases including 27 outbreaks. In Pima County at this time, the highly contagious COVID-19 Delta variant has become the dominant strain and is up to 6 times more contagious than other strains.

As of August 12, 2021, Pima County has had 2,468 deaths from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, an increase of 9 deaths since July 31, 2021. Approximately one out of every 426 residents in Pima County has died due to COVID-19. A growing number of younger and middle-aged people are being hospitalized with COVID-19.

In addition to the growing number of cases in school settings, Pima County is seeing increasing numbers of pediatric cases where COVID illness is seriously affecting young children. This has resulted in more children being seen in emergency rooms due to COVID-19 illness, as well as for other reasons including lung and respiratory infections (RSV) and flu.

Area hospitals are experiencing more people presenting to the ER who are sick for reasons other than COVID-19 such as heart attacks, RSV and sepsis, who require hospital admission. This is putting significant pressure on critical health care resources. Currently, there is very limited availability of ICU beds as well as adult medical-surgical beds across the area hospitals. Local hospitals are also experiencing abnormally long wait times for EMS to be able to transfer care of their patient to the hospital staff. When this happens, EMS crews remain out of service and are unable to respond to other emergencies.

It is NOT the norm for area hospitals to be experiencing such high hospital admission rates, reduced hospital surge capacity and long EMS offload times at this time of year. Area hospitals, across the board, have severe nursing workforce shortages due to high rates of turnover and burnout from the pandemic. Local hospitals are being forced to rely on travelling nursing staff to ensure adequate clinical services.

Due to the increased demand for hospital beds, Pima County's hospital capacity is now stretched very thin-creating a growing cause for concern. PCHD is actively assisting area hospitals to request federal assistance to address the healthcare workforce shortages and alleviate decreased surge capacity.

### **Vaccination**

- Information about vaccination rates in Pima County is available at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>
- Anyone 12 years or older can receive the Pfizer-Biotech COVID-19 vaccine in Pima County. Pima County Health Clinics have COVID-19 vaccines available at no cost. Further information on vaccine availability is at [www.pima.gov/covid19vaccine](http://www.pima.gov/covid19vaccine)
- Breakthrough cases – infections that occur after an individual has been fully vaccinated – account for 1,188 of Pima County's 557,742 individuals who are fully vaccinated, or 0.2% of cases as of August 12, 2021.