



**Quad Cities COVID-19 Coalition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2021**

Recording of today's call

A video recording can be found at <https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/covid19/news>

Opening remark: Vaccination campaign marks 1 year

Remarks from Janet Hill, chief operating officer and PIO, Rock Island County Health Department

I want you to think back to a year ago this week. In an iconic image, Rosalinda Lopez, a registered nurse at Genesis, flexed her arm as her generation's Rosie the Riveter after proudly taking the life-saving COVID-19 vaccine. This one image conveyed hope after a long period of darkness, suffering, and death. A year later, we're still living in that shadowy time before the sun fully rises. In the Quad-Cities, we sit at a 60% vaccination rate. That means that 40% of those eligible to be vaccinated have not stepped into the light to end the pandemic. We're back to overflowing hospitals, exhausted healthcare and public health workers, and grieving families. Except this time, it's all preventable.

Genesis ICU beds full

Dr. Kurt Andersen, senior vice president, physician operations and chief medical officer, Genesis Health System, did not speak from prepared remarks.

"Our biggest challenge is in our critical care areas. This morning, out of all our critical care beds available throughout Genesis Health System, 80% of those beds are occupied by patients with COVID-19. Of those patients, and consistently throughout the pandemic, 90% of those patients have not vaccinated."

UnityPoint resources stretched beyond capacity

Remarks from Dr. Toyosi Olutade, chief medical officer at UnityPoint Health-Quad Cities

Caring for our community

In this season of giving, the biggest gift you can give to your healthcare teams, family, friends and neighbors is the gift of health. The best way to do this is to get vaccinated, wear a mask and limit your in-person interactions.

Resources

- We have finite resources.
- We're operating at more than 100% of our ICU capacity, with more than 80% of our ICU space filled with COVID-19 patients.

What's different with this surge than previous ones?

- Our team members are working long hours, taking extra shifts and are facing the uncertainty of COVID.
- While other industries are experiencing worker shortages as well, many of these delays – packages arriving later, longer waits at restaurants or your favorite items out of stock at the grocery store don't impact your overall quality of life. You can't say the same for healthcare.
- We need this information to inspire action rather than spread fear. We're at yet another critical juncture in our fight against this deadly virus. Our teams are continually rising to the challenge, but the reality is the rapid growth in cases and hospitalizations is straining our healthcare system and staff.
- We continue to take the necessary steps to care for our community.
- Combined with some relaxation in masking and a slow uptick in the number of people getting vaccinated or receiving their booster shots, we can see the virus continuing to take a strong hold and spreading freely in our communities. With the Omicron variant's impact largely unknown, now – more than ever – we need the public to act. Please, get vaccinated. Second, wear a mask – even if you're vaccinated and even indoors. Please carefully consider your holiday gatherings.

With rising COVID cases and a worker shortage, how are you tackling the needs of the community?

- We exist to meet our community's healthcare needs – whether it's care for COVID, heart attack, stroke or trauma. But our teams are tired and exhausted. Still each and every single day, they show up. Not for UnityPoint Health or a paycheck but for you - their friends and neighbors.
- Sadly, we are not where we hoped to be this year in our battle against COVID-19. Today we have the necessary PPE and supplies but our available beds and caring, trained people to staff them remains in short supply.
- The ongoing pandemic is stretching our personnel resources.
- We continually evaluate our capacity (beds, staffing and supplies) and adjust our operations accordingly. This may include temporarily postponing or pausing elective surgeries and redeploying staff in leadership roles and from our clinics to help in the hospital. We are exploring creative solutions to ensure those who need our help receive it without delay.

Overwhelmed healthcare systems scary for community

Remarks from Amy Thoreson, director, Scott County Health Department

As a member of this community, who lives here, works here, and is raising a family here, I am scared that both of the hospital systems that my family and I depend on for care when we need it may not be available for us.

I'm also frustrated. Public health has no other tools at its disposal to change the current COVID-19 situation around. We can only offer vaccine, offer test kits, and promote masking — all as widely and loudly as possible.

But it is now up to our community. It is up to each resident to make a choice to be part of the solution or, unfortunately, be part of the problem.

You may not like the options in front of you: vaccines and masks. But you can't like this situation in front of you either if you need medical care for you or your family. Choices are hard.

Now is the time to act.

Health department can give more shots

Remarks from Nita Ludwig, administrator, Rock Island County Health Department

The primary mission of the Rock Island County Health Department is to *prevent* illness and the spread of disease within the community. We do this through vaccination. Vaccines have been thoroughly tested and are safe. Vaccines work! COVID-19 vaccines will protect people from serious illness and death. Vaccines protect others. Everyone 5 and older has plenty of opportunities to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

RICHD holds walk-in clinics for those over 12 on Tuesdays and Fridays in our building from 9 a.m. to noon and 1-4 p.m. Moderna and Johnson and Johnson are offered each Tuesday and Pfizer is offered on Fridays. These clinics can be for first dose, second dose or boosters. We have been averaging 150 shots per clinic day. We CAN DO MORE shots on these days. Please stop in and get vaccinated. There are also many pharmacies, Community Health Care, and other providers in our county to obtain a vaccination. Find your shot at www.vaccines.gov.

The time to act is NOW. The sooner we get the community vaccinated, the sooner we can end this pandemic.

These small steps will help us all get back to things we love and the people we love:

- Get vaccinated and get your booster
- Wear a mask when indoors
- Social distance
- Wash your hands often
- Stay home when you are feeling sick

More information

- www.TogetherQC.com
- coronavirus.iowa.gov
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>

- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccinedata?county=Rock%20Island>
- <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=2>

###