We are currently facing a critical stage in the COVID-19 pandemic. The Delta variant is pushing cases up across the country, including right here in Minnesota. The Delta variant is significantly more infectious than the original strain of COVID-19. It is the dominant version circulating in Minnesota, causing 3 out of every 4 COVID-19 cases in our state. As we head into the fall and children go back to school, we need to do everything we can to prevent a new surge in cases.

According to the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#), McLeod County has seen a substantial transmission rate of COVID-19 compared to moderate or low in transmission across other parts of the nation. COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are once again increasing in nearly all states, fueled by the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant, which is much more contagious than past versions of the virus. The highest spread of cases and severe outcomes is happening in places with low vaccination rates. Although COVID-19 vaccination is the most effective prevention measure, vaccination rates across the United States have varied.

McLeod County to date
The county has had 4,400 COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, and 61 deaths.
Currently, 59 % of the county's population 12 years of age and over have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and 16,392 McLeod County residents have completed their vaccination series. Statewide 69.4% of the population age 12 and older have received at least one dose.

Residents are encouraged to get vaccinated
For those who are eligible (ages 12+) to get vaccinated but haven't yet done so, now is the time to do it. A full vaccination series provide strong protection against serious illness, hospitalization, and death. There are various places that currently offer the vaccine such as your local clinic or pharmacy. McLeod County Health and Human Services continues to offer vaccination clinics for residents ages 18 and up administering the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Visit McLeod County's website for registration information. The State of Minnesota is currently offering an incentive program to Minnesotans to encourage them to get their COVID-19 vaccinations. Minnesotans who get their first COVID-19 vaccine dose July 30 through August 15 will be eligible to receive a $100 Visa gift card from the State of Minnesota. Minnesotans will receive the cards by mail or email from the Minnesota Department of Health or a State of Minnesota vendor. Beginning Wednesday, August 4, Minnesotans can verify their first dose and indicate their request for a Visa gift card at www.mn.gov/covid19/100 . The program is available for up to 24,330 registrants.

Get Tested for COVID-19
Even as Minnesotans continue to push back COVID-19 through vaccination and other measures, health officials said COVID-19 testing still remains important in the coming months to help us keep the virus at bay. COVID-19 testing remains available locally at Hutchinson Health, Glencoe Regional Health, Coborn's Pharmacy and Total Compliance. You can also order an at home saliva test through Vault Health at: https://mn.gov/covid19/share-our-message/social/index.jsp

The updated MDH guidance includes the following key points:
- People who are not fully vaccinated should get tested if they are in contact with someone who has COVID-19.
- People who are not fully vaccinated should also get tested every two weeks if they have frequent contact with people outside their household, or if they participate in activities where social distancing may not be possible.
- People who are not fully vaccinated should get tested after travel within the U.S.
- Vaccinated or not, anyone who travels internationally should get tested upon returning to Minnesota.

McLeod County Government Center
520 Chandler Avenue North, Glencoe, Minnesota 55336
Public Health: 320.864.3185 | Social Services: 320.864.3144 or 1.800.247.1756
www.co.mcleod.mn.us

@mcleodcountymn

People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose of Pfizer or Moderna, or two weeks after Johnson & Johnson.

"Minnesotans ages 12 and older are eligible to get vaccinated, and they should take advantage of this protection as the best way to end their pandemic worries," Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said. However, with the virus still circulating in communities and many people still susceptible, COVID-19 testing remains an important tool in keeping the virus from spreading to those who are unvaccinated. This is particularly important for those younger than 12, who are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

Other ways to continue to protect yourself and others:

- Wash your hands often and stay home if you feel sick.

- If you are not fully vaccinated, wear a mask, stay 6 feet from others, and avoid gatherings.

- Vaccinated or not vaccinated, MDH strongly recommends that you wear a mask in specific settings or situations found at Recommendations for Wearing Masks.

- Variants developing around the world can spread to new places when people travel. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends delaying travel until you are fully vaccinated. Visit CDC: International Travel During COVID-19.

- Because variants can spread more easily, it is important to get tested when recommended. Visit COVID-19 Testing.

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