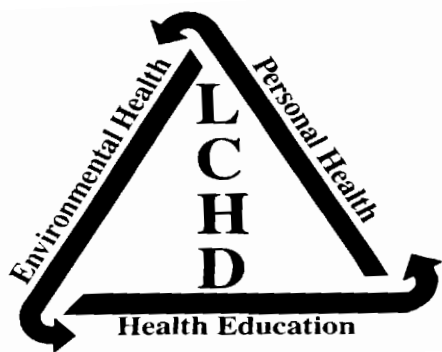


MEDIA RELEASE



Date: May 9, 2023
To: All Media
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For Immediate Release

“LaSalle County Health Department Marks the End of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) Declaration”

Ottawa, IL - On May 11, 2023, the State of Illinois and the nation will reach a major milestone as the Public Health Emergency (PHE) declarations that have been in place since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic will end. In honor of the public health and health care heroes who sacrificed to protect the public during the last three years, Governor JB Pritzker has declared May 11 as “Illinois Public Health & Health Care Hero Day.”

The LaSalle County Health Department would like to thank our county residents for their support during this time. When COVID-19 virus was first identified in early 2020, it was a new virus - the world had no natural immunity, or vaccine to help us fight the virus. Globally, many restrictions that hadn't been utilized since the 1918 flu pandemic were implemented – global travel restrictions, stay at home orders, social distancing and masking mandates became part of our new normal. The restrictions were at first, an attempt to stop the virus in its tracks, but later became more about protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities from severe infection.

Since the beginning of the pandemic the LaSalle County Health Department has aimed to provide our residents with the most up-to-date Covid-19 information as well as the local data regarding local disease transmission. This data helped our businesses, schools, hospitals, long term care facilities and our residents to make informed decisions about protecting our community and themselves from infection and most importantly from severe infection. In addition, our local communities and our community partners, worked together to help ensure protection for our vulnerable populations while trying to maintain a sense of normalcy in these unprecedented times.

As we know, the national and state emergency and public health emergency declarations for addressing the COVID-19 pandemic will end on May 11, 2023. But, Covid-19 has not disappeared, rather it has become part of our daily lives. It is still here and will likely continue to be a threat to our vulnerable populations for several years. But we know so much more about the virus and have made so much progress in our fight against severe infection. We have the tools available to fight severe infection and protect our loved ones and members of our community. Those tools include: washing your hands, staying up-to-date on your vaccination status, using at-

-More-

home tests if you have been exposed or have symptoms, staying home if you are sick, and wearing a mask if you have been exposed.

With the national and state Public Health Emergencies for COVID -19 expiring on May 11, there will be changes to data collection and reporting on the virus. After May 11, the CDC has announced it will stop tracking and reporting COVID-19 cases at the community level, meaning that it will no longer be providing a weekly update that show whether COVID-19 cases are at Low, Medium or High Level. Therefore, the Health Department will no longer include this information on their website. Please remember that our web page, <https://www.lasallecountyil.gov/721/COVID-19-Resources-and-Updates>, will continue to provide the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19. Our webpage also contains valuable links to assist residents to monitor symptoms, access testing locations, determine isolation & exposure calculations, and locate COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. Lastly, it provides links to COVID-19 data from the CDC and IDPH.

When the public health emergency ends, COVID-19 vaccines will continue to be free for all, as long as the supply of federally purchased vaccines lasts. However, access to and cost of testing and treatment will vary on whether they have public, private, or no health insurance.

Vaccines

- Vaccines will remain free for everyone when the public health emergency ends. As long as the supply of federally purchased vaccines lasts, COVID-19 vaccines will remain free.

Testing and Treatment

- Coverage for COVID-19 testing and treatment will vary by insurance type.
- For people with Medicaid coverage, COVID-19 testing and treatment will remain covered at no cost through September 2024.
- For those without insurance, COVID-19 testing and treatment will no longer be covered, and the cost will be determined by individual providers. However, free tests and treatment may be available at local free clinics or community health centers.

The end of the PHE means that the federal government is expected to phase out providing tests, vaccines and treatment directly to states – however these efforts will not end immediately, but over the coming months. The state of Illinois is continuing to offer at-home rapid tests to households in economically disadvantaged communities through June 30, through a partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation’s Project ACT - <https://www.accesscovidtests.org/en>. When existing stockpiles of tests, vaccines and treatments run out, coverage will shift to private insurers.

In conclusion, LaSalle County Health Department continues to monitor newly-reported COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths just as we do for other reportable diseases. Monitoring COVID-19 and keeping the public informed is very important to us. If things change or we feel that, based on current conditions, a return to more detailed COVID reports is necessary, we will adjust accordingly. For additional information, please contact the LaSalle County Health Department at 815-433-3366 or visit the Health Department’s website at www.lasallecountyil.gov.

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