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COVID-19 Region 4 Hits 7 Percent Positivity as Public Health Officials Urge Local Businesses to Follow Public Health Guidance

20th Jul, 2020

Four Cases Include Individuals Tied to Party Bus Rental Companies as Increase in Positivity Rate Threatens to Move Region Back in New Mitigation Plan

DHS and Public Health Officials Responding to Outbreak at Chester Mental Center in Randolph County

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health is closely monitoring a rise in cases in the Metro East region, COVID-19 region 4, as the region surpasses 7 percent positivity rate as of today, July 20, fueled by 7 consecutive days of positivity rate increases. Under the plan to combat a resurgence of COVID-19 announced by Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health last week, a region will automatically move to the first tier of mitigation steps following three consecutive days averaging greater than an 8 percent positivity rate.

Randolph and St. Clair counties are currently the primary contributors to the rise in positivity rate in region 4 of the new mitigation plan, but there are concerning trends and behaviors throughout the region, which also includes Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, and Washington counties. Several of these counties also border and are home to residents who travel frequently to Missouri where less stringent mitigations have been in place.

A number of the individuals who have tested positive have informed public health officials that they engaged in some of the same activities. Specifically, four individuals told public health officials that they participated in events or were close contacts of participants in events involving the party bus company the “Shakin’ Shuttle”

Public health officials are also concerned with reports of large gatherings without social distancing taking place in the region. Specifically, Hidden Lake Winery in Aviston is reported to have hosted several large events, contrary to public health guidance.

Public health officials are also responding to an outbreak at Chester Mental Health Center in Randolph County, where 6 residents and 41 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19 since June 25. The Department of Human Services is working closely with local health departments and officials to help prevent further spread and keep residents and staff safe.

“Businesses that disregard public health guidance are putting themselves and their communities at risk and threatening the progress we’ve made for the vast majority of businesses that are safely reopening,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “I urge county and local officials in the Metro East region to take action in response to those who refuse to help keep people safe and to consider broader mitigations before the state is required to take action. As I’ve said, local officials are our first line of defense when it comes to concerning trends in their communities, but IDPH is ready to take immediate action if the data requires it.”

“This virus is still out there and it is the responsibility of all of us, local officials, businesses, and every day Illinoisans, to take the actions we know will keep people safe,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “We know from the data that large gatherings and groups of people in confined closed spaces can lead to a spike in cases, and we have seen some examples popping up right now. IDPH will work closely with our local health department partners to respond to these concerning trends and will not hesitate to restore mitigations to prevent a full resurgence of COVID-19.”

Under the new mitigation plan announced last week, additional mitigation steps will be reinstated in a region following a sustained rise in the positivity rate along with either a sustained increase in COVID-19 hospital admissions or a critical reduction in hospital bed capacity. A sustained rise in the positivity rate is defined as an increase in the 7-day rolling average for 7 days out of a 10-day period. In addition, if a region hits three consecutive days of an 8 percent average positivity rate, automatic action will be required.

The first tier of mitigation steps can include suspending indoor bar service, reducing indoor dining capacity, reducing elective surgeries and procedures, placing additional limits on gatherings and room capacity, expanding remote work, as well as potential further mitigation steps relating to recreational activities, retail, and salon and personal care based on data received.

As always, local officials remain the first line of defense in the fight against COVID-19. Local officials can and should enforce public health guidance from the state. Local officials are also encouraged to put in place additional public health guidance that expands upon guidance from the state and meets the needs of their unique communities. IDPH works closely with local health department across the state and is always eager to be a partner in that effort.



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