

Contact: MaryWade Burnside  
Public Information Officer  
Monongalia County Health Department  
Morgantown, WV 26505  
(304) 598-5152 | [www.monchd.org](http://www.monchd.org)  
MaryWade.Burnside@wv.gov



## **For Immediate Release**

### ***Monongalia County Health Department recommends 10-day COVID isolation***

**MORGANTOWN, WV (Jan. 5, 2022)** — As the nation and West Virginia deal with a new — and unprecedented — wave of COVID-19, Monongalia County Health Officer Dr. Lee B. Smith urges individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 to continue to isolate for 10 days after diagnosis.

“The mitigation strategies we’ve been using since the start of the COVID pandemic in March 2020 have served us well,” said Dr. Smith of Monongalia County Health Department.

That also includes the recommendation that those who have been exposed to COVID-19 quarantine for 14 days.

“As of January 2022, Monongalia County has one of the lower numbers of infections and lower numbers of deaths per population compared to other counties in West Virginia,” Dr. Smith said.

As an example, as of Jan. 5, Monongalia County has reported 159 deaths altogether due to COVID. By comparison, Kanawha County has 577 and other larger West Virginia counties have more than 200: Wood, 277; Raleigh, 227; Berkeley, 215 and Harrison, 202.

But, Dr. Smith noted, on Tuesday, the United States had a reported 1 million new COVID infections, which is the first time the country has reached that threshold in a single day. These cases are a mix of the deadlier delta variant and the new, highly-infectious omicron variant.

And Monongalia County’s number of active cases have also skyrocketed, from 282 on Dec. 23 to 1,139 on Jan. 5, literally quadrupling in under two weeks.

Monongalia County Health Department  
453 Van Voorhis Road  
Morgantown, WV 26505

“The current chart depicting the rise in COVID cases in Monongalia County shows a vertical line,” Dr. Smith said. “It’s extremely concerning.”

According to Luke Moore, Ph.D., MCHD’s regional epidemiologist, the seven-day average of new daily cases in Monongalia County increased 167% when compared to the seven-day average of the previous week.

“Furthermore, as of Jan. 4, the seven-day average per 100,000 population is 139.9, which is the highest it has ever been since this pandemic began,” Moore said.

So when it comes to the current guidance on COVID isolation and quarantining, Dr. Smith said, “This is not the time to change horses mid-stream. Or surfboards in the middle of a tsunami.”

Therefore, Dr. Smith told the Monongalia County Commission on Wednesday during its weekly meeting that the health department recommends that anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 should isolate for 10 days, instead of the five days as recently shortened in a press release by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)).

That CDC recommendation also includes caveats that isolation should end only after symptoms have ended or lessened, and that individuals who do end isolation after only five days should also be sure to wear a tight-fitting mask when around others.

“We worry that people will take shortcuts, and it’s going to have a negative impact on our community and on our workforce,” Dr. Smith said. “We want to keep schools open. But we’re currently seeing that every nursing home and most day-care centers have outbreaks.

“So how do you preserve county function and safety? We’re maintaining our recommendations to keep isolation to 10 days and quarantining for 14 days until this wave breaks over us. It’s the most reasonable thing to do.”

Those who test positive for COVID are generally considered to be infectious from a couple of days prior to diagnosis and then for up to 10 days after that.

“This no doubt will cause confusion, but it needs to be repeated, that when the isolation period has been reduced from 10 to five days, that can only occur if the person’s symptoms have improved or gone away, that the person is able to wear a mask for an additional five days and that they get a test to verify that they are no longer infectious during the second period of isolation,” Dr. Smith said.

Also, as home tests become more available, Dr. Smith also asks that anyone who takes one and has positive results to please report this to the health department by calling 304-598-5100, and to consider verifying the positive result with a PCR test. This is the gold standard, and tests conducted by MCHD at the WVU Rec Center report results, as do some other locations.

“As soon as this wave of current infections is reduced, then we will again revisit all of our strategies,” Dr. Smith said.

The schedule for MCHD’s free PCR COVID testing at the WVU Rec Center has been set through January: 7 a.m.-noon Mondays, 8 a.m.-noon Tuesdays, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Thursdays and 8 a.m.-noon Fridays. COVID vaccinations and boosters are given at the Rec Center on Wednesdays, from 9-11 a.m. for Pfizer (12 and up) and 1-3 p.m. for Moderna (18 and up).

To register in advance for a COVID test, go to [getmywvrdlreport.com](https://getmywvrdlreport.com). To make an appointment for a COVID vaccine, go to [book.novelhealth.ai/MCHDC](https://book.novelhealth.ai/MCHDC).

To be considered fully vaccinated now according to the CDC means to not only have two doses of vaccine but also a booster, Dr. Smith said.

“These are only recommendations,” he added. “These are not public health orders or mandates. But if you are asking me how to keep you healthy, this is our guidance.”

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out [monchd.org](https://monchd.org) and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD, on Instagram at #wvmchd and on TikTok at wvmchd.

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