

Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and the COVID-19 response – January 2021 update

The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) at Hennepin County Public Health (HCPH) remains committed to providing resources, technical assistance, and evidence-based information for subrecipients and people with HIV (PWH) to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter provides an update on the RWHAP's response as COVID-19 cases remain high and the COVID-19 vaccine distribution continues. The RWHAP consulted with the HCPH epidemiology and communications teams in the development of this update.

General COVID-19 information

This update along with other information for Ryan White subrecipients can be found on the RWHAP Hennepin County webpage. The RWHAP will continue to post relevant COVID-19 information there as the situation evolves (<https://www.hennepin.us/business/work-with-henn-co/ryan-white-hiv-services#Ryan-White-COVID-19-response>).

The RWHAP coordinates its response within the broader Hennepin County COVID-19 response (<https://www.hennepin.us/covid-19>). The RWHAP encourages our subrecipients to visit these websites for updated information:

- Take Care Hennepin provides COVID-19 information in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong (<https://www.takecarehennepin.org/>).
- At the state level, the Minnesota Department of Health continually updates its COVID-19 webpage (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>).
- Stay Safe MN provides information on how all state agencies are coordinating their COVID-19 efforts (<https://staysafe.mn.gov/>).
- Finally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintain a page specific to HIV and COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/hiv.html>).



HIV-specific COVID-19 vaccination information

As subrecipient staff, you will likely be asked questions by your clients about the COVID-19 vaccine. The RWHAP recipient staff, as part of the public health department, are committed to helping you communicate clear, evidence-based information about the COVID-19 vaccine to people with HIV (PWH).

If you have specific questions regarding COVID-19 and its impact on PWH or Ryan White services, please reach out to the RWHAP. Your contract manager remains the best point of contact, but any person on the grant administration team can take questions. We are happy to help you find answers if they are not addressed in the information listed below.

COVID-19 vaccine frequently asked questions

Hennepin County has COVID-19 vaccine frequently asked questions (FAQs) that are continually updated:

- COVID-19 vaccine FAQs in English (<https://hennepin.us/vaccinefaq>)
- COVID-19 vaccine FAQs in other languages (<https://hennepin.us/vaccinefaqtranslations>)

The Hennepin County COVID-19 vaccine FAQs links to other trusted vaccine FAQs:

- Minnesota Department of Health, About COVID-19 Vaccine (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/basics.html>)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>)

COVID-19 vaccine information specific to people with HIV

As of January 21, 2021, Minnesota and Hennepin County are in Phase 1a of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. Phase 1a includes people working in healthcare settings, residents of long-term care facilities, emergency medical services, COVID-19 vaccinators and testers, and people experiencing homelessness. The state is on track to have provided at least one of the two vaccine doses to all Minnesotans who fall into phase 1a by the end of January.

On January 18, the Governor announced that the state is beginning to vaccinate new groups, including:

- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Prekindergarten through grade 12 educators and school staff
- Staff working in licensed and certified childcare programs

The state is launching nine pilot sites to vaccinate these newly eligible Minnesotans. Minnesotans age 65 and older can schedule an appointment at one of these pilot sites online at mn.gov/vaccine or by phone at 612-426-7230 or 833-431-2053. You MUST have an appointment. No walk-ins will be accepted.

A detailed Phase 1b or 1c plan has not been finalized yet. Minnesota will provide details in the coming weeks as the Biden administration provides more guidance to states. Ultimately, all Minnesotans will have the opportunity to get vaccinated.

When it's their turn, most people will get the vaccine through their primary health care provider. The COVID-19 vaccine itself is free but, by law, healthcare systems and clinics are allowed to charge vaccine administration fees and/or clinic visit fees. These fees will likely be covered by healthcare insurance. If an individual does not have insurance or cannot afford these fees, other opportunities for fully free COVID-19 vaccination (e.g., community vaccination events) will become available later in 2021.

Learn more

- When the RWHAP learns of changes impacting PWH, this information will be communicated to Ryan White subrecipients.
- In the meantime, keep up to date at the Minnesota Department of Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Phases and Planning webpage (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/plan.html>)

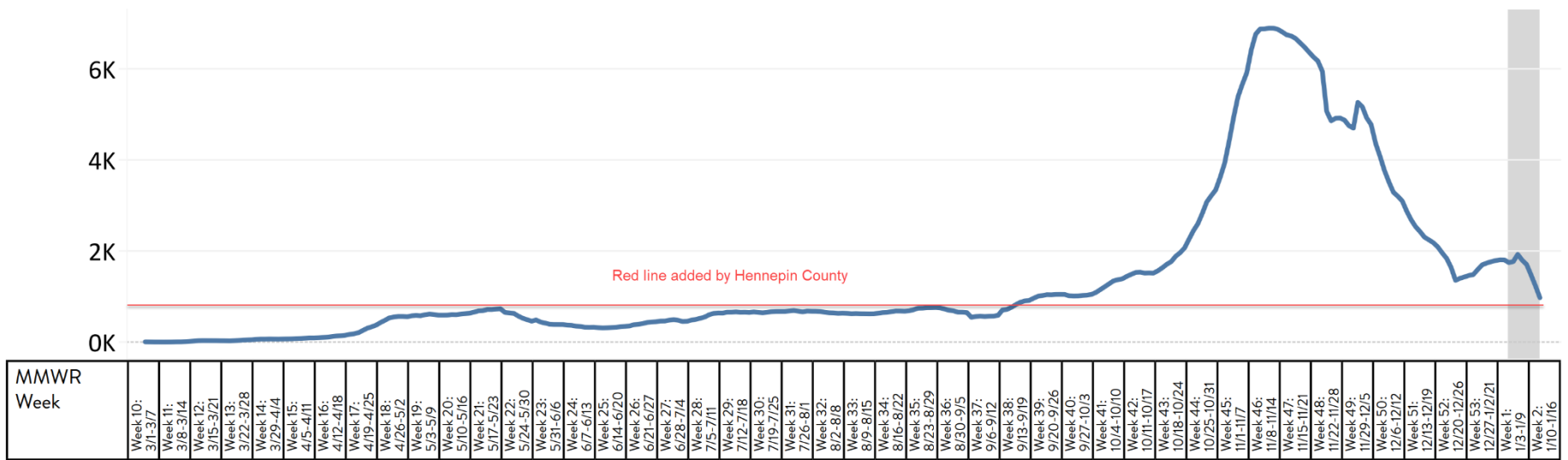
Mask mandate required for all Ryan White subrecipients

An executive order issued by President Biden on January 20 mandates that all federal contractors wear masks and follow CDC COVID-19 workplace safety guidelines. This executive order applies to all federal Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program subrecipients. Given Minnesota has had a mask mandate since July 2020, the RWHAP anticipates this will not change current practices at subrecipients. If you have questions, please contact your contract manager.

COVID-19 prevalence remains alarmingly high

Since record high daily cases in November, there has been a steady decline through December and into January. However, as the red line shows below, cases remain above the peak case counts during the summer months. Even as the COVID-19 vaccine is distributed, we need to remain vigilant in COVID-19 precautions. In a recent interview, Dr. Susan Palchick, HCPH director, reminded residents, "The vaccine is a wonderful thing. However, like the other prevention tools, it is not enough on its own. We will still need people to wear masks, stay at least six feet apart, avoid crowded places, stay home when sick and get tested for COVID-19. Having the layers of protection is important to stopping the pandemic."

Seven Day Moving Average of New Cases



Minnesota Department of Health Weekly COVID-19 Report: Updated 1/14/2021 with data current as of 4 p.m. the previous day.

Screenshot from Situation Update for COVID-19, Minnesota Department of Health

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html>

New COVID-19 variants

Two new SARS-CoV-2 variant strains have been identified from the United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa. Both have been found to be more transmissible than the currently circulating strain but do not appear to change illness severity. Additionally, the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers believe that their vaccines are effective against these new strains.

On January 9, 2021, the Minnesota Department of Health announced that the UK variant had been detected in Minnesota (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2021/covid010921.html>).

Questions remain regarding these new variants. However, the increased transmissibility of the new COVID-19 variants emphasizes the need to continue to follow steps for reducing your risk of COVID-19:

- Wear a mask
- Stay six feet apart from others in public places
- Cover your coughs or sneezes
- Wash your hands frequently
- Get tested if you have symptoms or have been exposed
- Stay at home if you are sick or waiting on test results

Planning for operational disruptions

Due to the consistently high prevalence of COVID-19, the RWHAP recipient and subrecipients need to continue service delivery adaptations. In 2020, two subrecipients were forced to close due to COVID-19 outbreaks among staff. While we remain hopeful this does not happen again, the RWHAP should plan for that possibility. The RWHAP asks each subrecipient to develop a continuity of operations plan (COOP) and a client communications plan.

Continuity of operations plan (COOP)

A continuity of operations plan (COOP) prioritizes critical operations in the event of staff reductions. Earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, the RWHAP requested a COOP from each subrecipient. Review your COOP to ensure it still meets the current situation and modify it as needed. The RWHAP can provide technical assistance to any subrecipient to review, develop, or update this plan. We have had to develop our own COOP in line with HCPH's COVID-19 response.

Client communications plan

A client communications plan outlines how clients would be informed of service disruptions if your agency's operations are reduced or closed. Include alternatives where a client can obtain services and information during your agency's service disruptions.

JustUs Health AIDSLine

The AIDSLine remains a resource for all people with HIV, including if clients have an emergent need during their regular provider's closure due to COVID-19.

Phone: 612-373-2437

Email: aidsline@justushealth.org

Text AIDSLine to 839863

Website: <https://www.justushealth.org/aidsline>

Hennepin County Public Health

The Red Door Clinic, part of Hennepin County Public Health clinics, remains a resource for subrecipients and clients that need medical care and referrals. When developing this communication, the RWHAP worked with our HCPH colleagues.

The Red Door Clinic can assist with access and linkage to HIV care and treatment services, coordination of HIV medical appointments, and provide information and referral regarding Ryan White community resources.

Phone (confidential call/text): 612-695-1878

Email: RedDoor@hennepin.us

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 612-348-7414.