

# Press Release

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## **Reno County in the Orange: Health Department Alarmed at Acceleration in COVID-19 Case Counts**

**Hutchinson, Kan, Oct. 9, 2020** – With an average of 15 new positive COVID-19 cases confirmed per day in the past week, 13 hospitalizations, and news of three deaths since yesterday, Reno County health officials are highly concerned about an accelerating level of COVID-19 in Reno County. The county is now solidly in the “Moderate Level” orange alert, defined as “many cases with community spread and undetected cases likely.”

As of noon on Friday, Oct. 9, Reno County had 245 active cases, of which 91 are associated with Hutchinson Correctional Facility, including both inmates and employees. There are seven additional active clusters.

Forty-three cases are associated with long-term care facilities, including both staff and residents. “It’s a misconception that cases are happening only among our elderly population in long-term care,” Hammersmith said.

The 14-day positive test rate excluding inmates is reported at 14.7 percent, keeping schools in the orange zone for at least another week. Data is trending toward moving to the red zone next week, which would involve fully remote learning for most students.

“The actions people take today have a direct impact two weeks from now,” said Karen Hammersmith, Reno County Health Officer and Health Department Interim Co-Director. “Our increasing number of positive cases is a problem in Reno County, and everyone needs to take personal responsibility to solve it.”

Hutchinson Regional Medical Center reports a record thirteen COVID-19 cases in their census, with 2 positive cases on ventilators. “This week we have seen the highest number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients since the pandemic began. It’s a serious community problem,” she said.

Hammersmith and her team are pleading with residents to protect themselves and others with measures shown to slow the spread:

- Wear and properly use masks, covering both mouth and nose
- Avoid gatherings, especially in poorly ventilated spaces
- Social distance by more than six feet
- Wash hands frequently
- Monitor yourself for symptoms and stay home if you are ill

“It’s easy to think your close friends and family are ‘safe,’ but in truth, we’re seeing a significant number of cases triggered by people they know and trust at weddings, church services, dinners, and social events,” Hammersmith said.

Hammersmith said students and parents are counting on the community to take personal responsibility in slowing the spread, so that kids can stay in school face-to-face. “Schools are doing a good job of following protocols to stop the spread, but if community members are disregarding public health recommendations, they’re impacting thousands of students and families every day.”

For the latest case counts, see the newly reformatted Reno County COVID Dashboard and FAQ’s on the Reno County Health Department COVID-19 page at <https://www.renogov.org/741/COVID-19>.

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