



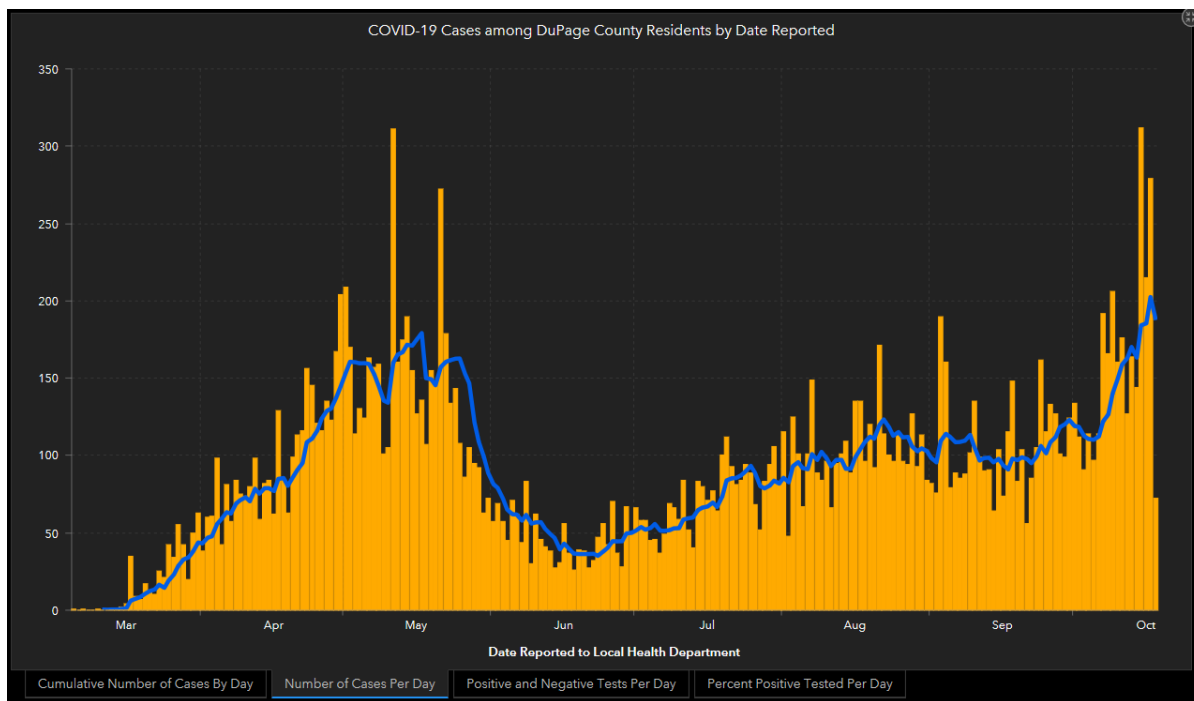
October 19, 2020

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Health Department Warns of Increasing COVID-19 Risks**

*Need for Individual and Community Cooperation Heightens*

**DuPage County**— COVID-19 activity continues to increase rapidly in DuPage County and the risk of state-imposed mitigation measures is growing more likely (see graph below). As of today, Monday, October 19th, the level of disease activity in DuPage County now meets the criteria identified for “Substantial Community Transmission” in the [DCHD COVID-19 Return to School Framework](#). When community transmission of COVID-19 meets the “Substantial” level, DuPage County Health Department (DCHD) encourages 100% remote learning to help protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of students, teachers, school staff, families, and communities.



Source: [www.dupagehealth.org/covid19data](http://www.dupagehealth.org/covid19data)

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While remote learning is recommended, school officials are encouraged to use their discretion and expertise to determine which populations of students should receive in-person instruction whose needs are less likely to be met by virtual instruction. In addition to county-level metrics and COVID-19 surveillance data, school-level considerations are important as well, such as case and outbreak activity, specific trends and distribution of cases, absenteeism among students and staff within a school, and alternate remote learning site options and safety protocols. In every learning model, school districts are also advised to follow the health and safety protocols set forth by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and DCHD.

This elevated level of COVID-19 community transmission marks a shift in the DCHD COVID-19 Return to School Framework and represents a call to action for all DuPage County residents to practice the prevention methods shown to be effective:

- wearing a mask whenever outside your home,
- maintaining at least six feet of distance from others,
- regularly washing hands, and
- avoiding in-person gatherings, particularly where all of these practices are not followed.

“Lowering rates of community transmission is essential to achieving our goal of safely reopening all schools,” said Karen Ayala, Executive Director at DuPage County Health Department. “School leaders in DuPage County are working to do everything they can to take all necessary precautions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in our schools, but each member of our community must do their part to support them.” As the number of cases in DuPage County rises, it becomes more challenging for schools to prevent transmission in school settings.

DuPage is a large county comprised of several smaller school communities and locally informed decisions are made by the superintendents to address their unique factors. In addition to county-level metrics and COVID-19 surveillance data, school-level considerations are important as well, such as case and outbreak activity, specific trends and distribution of cases, absenteeism among students and staff within a school, and alternate remote learning site options and safety protocols.

Reports of dozens of students and staff as COVID-19 cases have been received by DCHD in recent weeks, though public health investigations so far have found the majority of case reports not to be linked with outbreak activity inside the school. The risk of school-associated outbreak activity, however, increases with rising COVID-19 activity in the community.

“DuPage County schools strive to follow all of the health and safety measures recommended for schools by IDPH, DCHD, and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). However, the community plays a vital role in keeping our schools open for in-person learning. In order to prioritize and support opening schools safely and helping them to remain open, we should all be doing our part to reduce community transmission by wearing a mask, keeping our physical distance, keeping gatherings to a small number of people, and washing our hands frequently,” said Dr. Darlene Ruscitti, Superintendent, DuPage County Regional Office of Education.

While DuPage County school officials work to incorporate rigorous prevention measures, such strategies are most effective when overall community transmission is low. DCHD reminds residents to continue following the public health guidelines necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 including the 3Ws: wear a mask, watch your distance, and wash your hands.

Further, residents are urged to support ongoing local efforts to contain the spread by answering the call of contact tracers (the number that will appear on your phone is 312-777-1999 and/or COVID CONTACT; if you see this, please answer the call). Self-isolating by persons with COVID-19 and self-quarantining by their close contacts are critical to slow the spread of COVID-19. “We all need to take this seriously and we need everyone’s cooperation. Voluntary cooperation is best, though as needed, isolation/quarantine directives and orders may be pursued to help protect individuals and families in our community” said Ayala. “In addition, we know that we have the tools we need to reduce the spread of disease in our communities - we have done it before and we need everyone to #DoYourPartDuPage.”

Additional information regarding COVID-19 in DuPage County is available at [www.dupagehealth.org/covid19](http://www.dupagehealth.org/covid19).

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