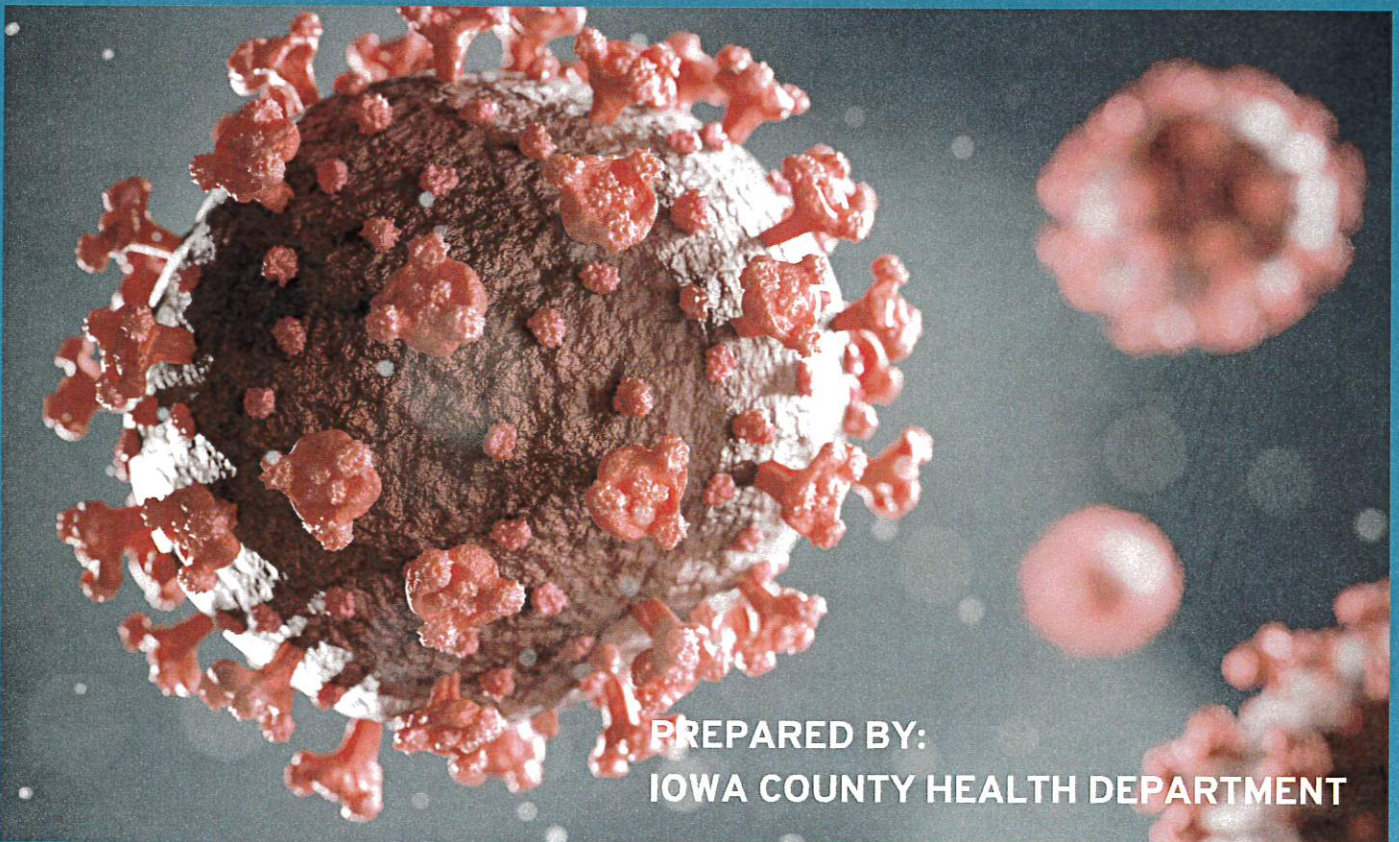


CUMULATIVE COVID-19 PANDEMIC REPORT

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC IN IOWA COUNTY, WISCONSIN FROM 2020-2023



PREPARED BY:
IOWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has been one of the most significant global health crises in modern history. It originated in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and rapidly spread worldwide, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the interconnectedness of our world and the importance of collective action in addressing global health emergencies.

INTRODUCTION

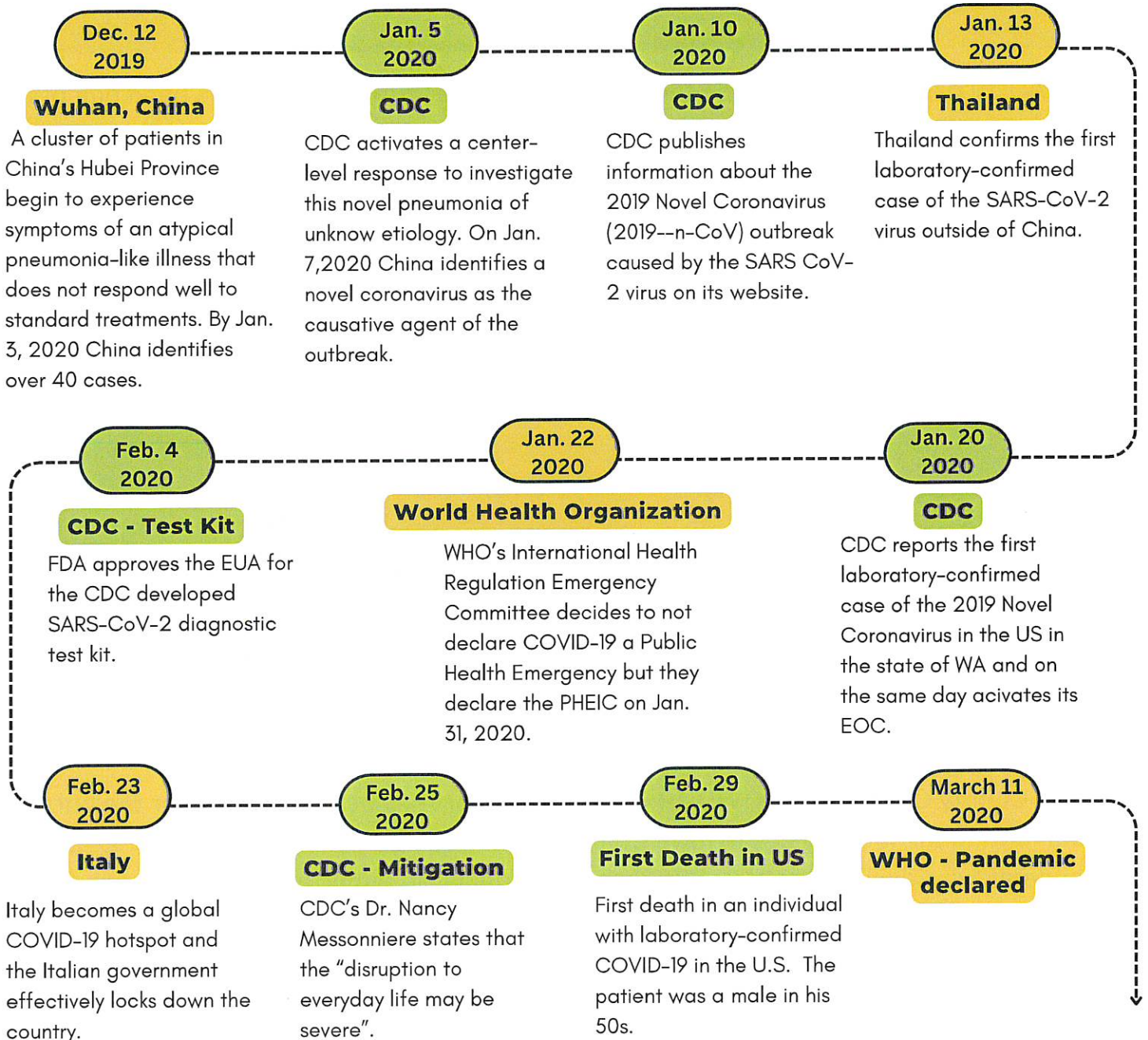
The Iowa County Cumulative COVID-19 Pandemic Report has been compiled for the purpose of documenting the journey of the Iowa County Health Department from March of 2020 when the pandemic was declared to May 2023 when the declared public health emergency ended.

The value of this report is meant to lie within the historical documentation of the pandemic as experienced by the local level including the organizational response, operational continuity and service delivery.

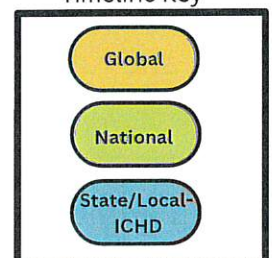
Moving forward with hope, this report will also include the lessons learned about best practices and future preparedness and resilience.

Note: unless otherwise cited, information and data contained within this report were collected and documented by the Iowa County Health Department staff.

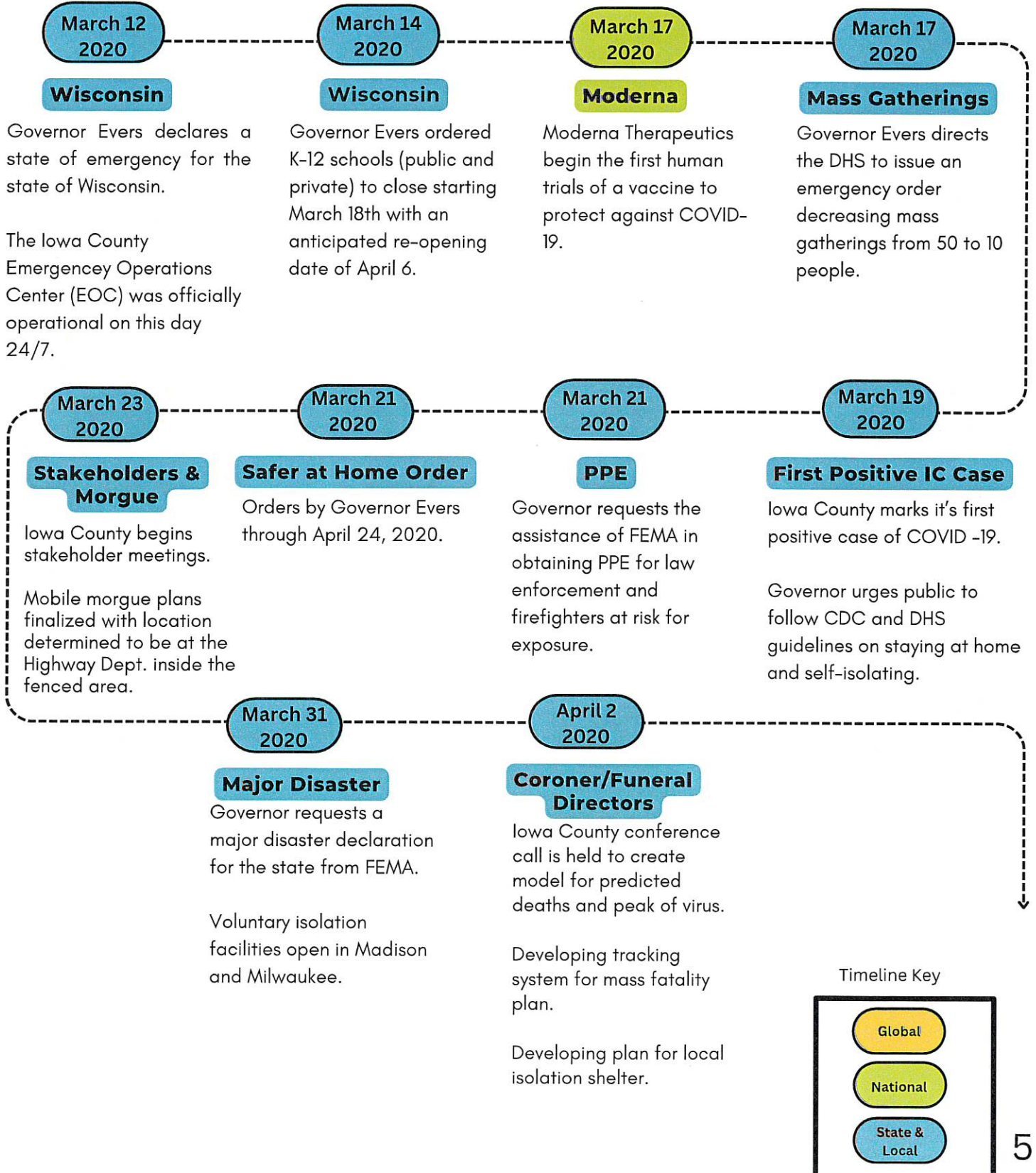
COVID-19 Timeline



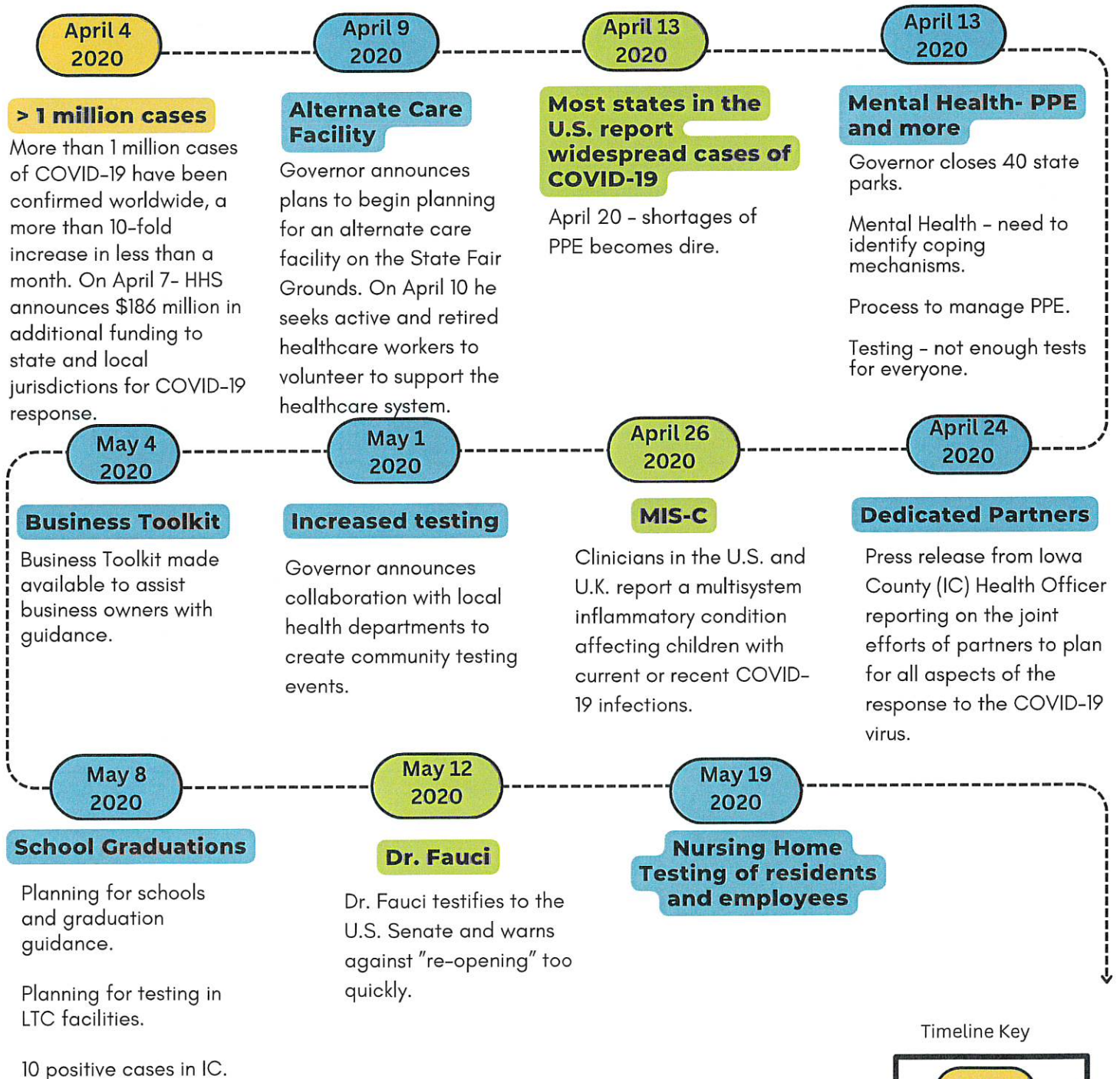
Timeline Key



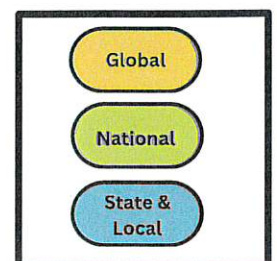
COVID-19 Timeline



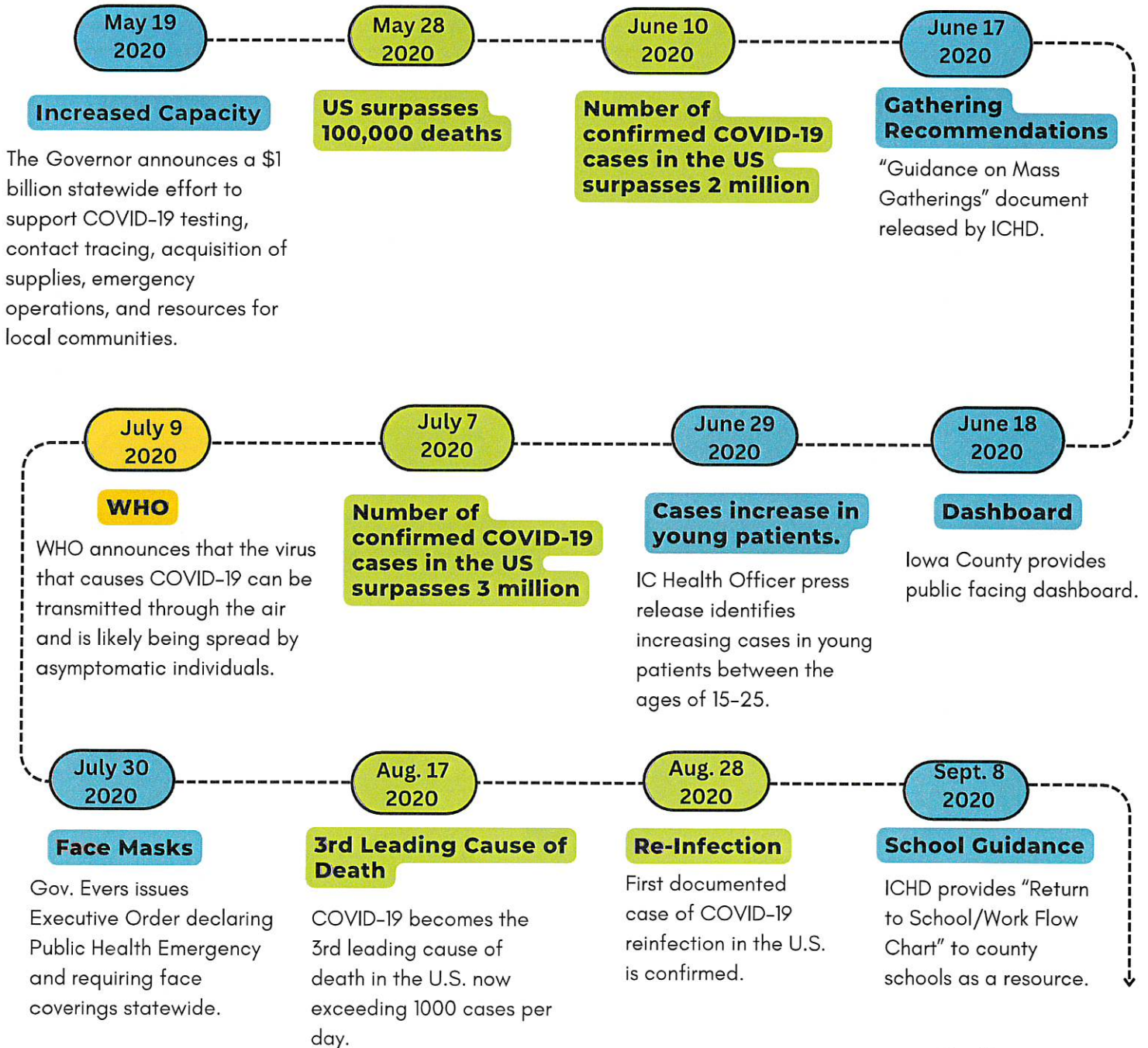
COVID-19 Timeline



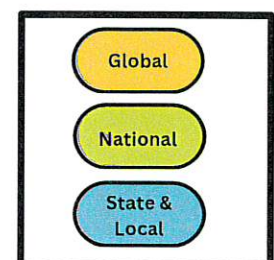
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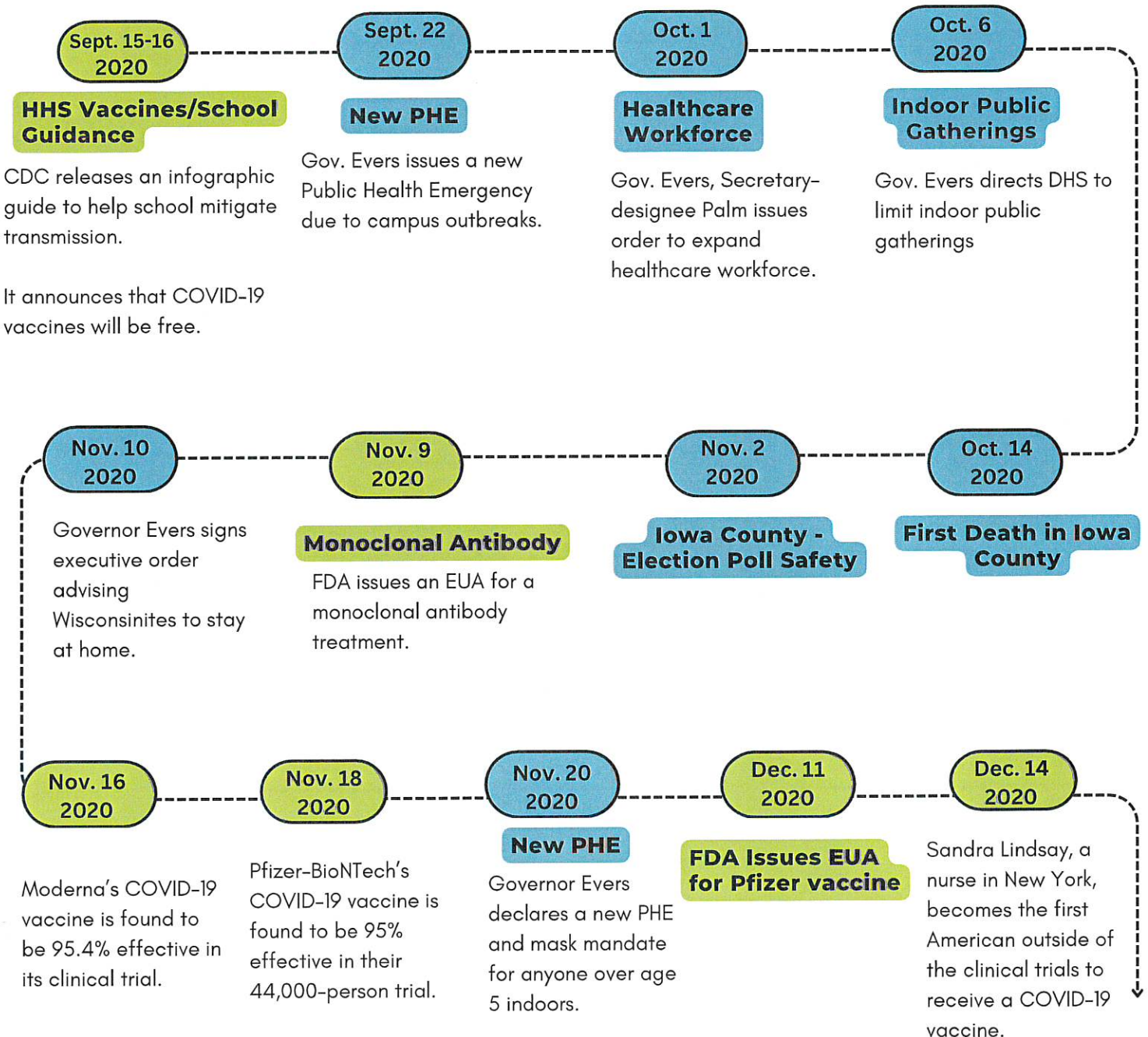
COVID-19 Timeline



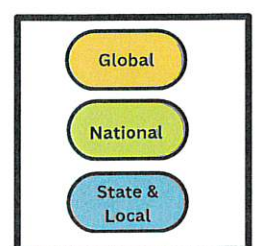
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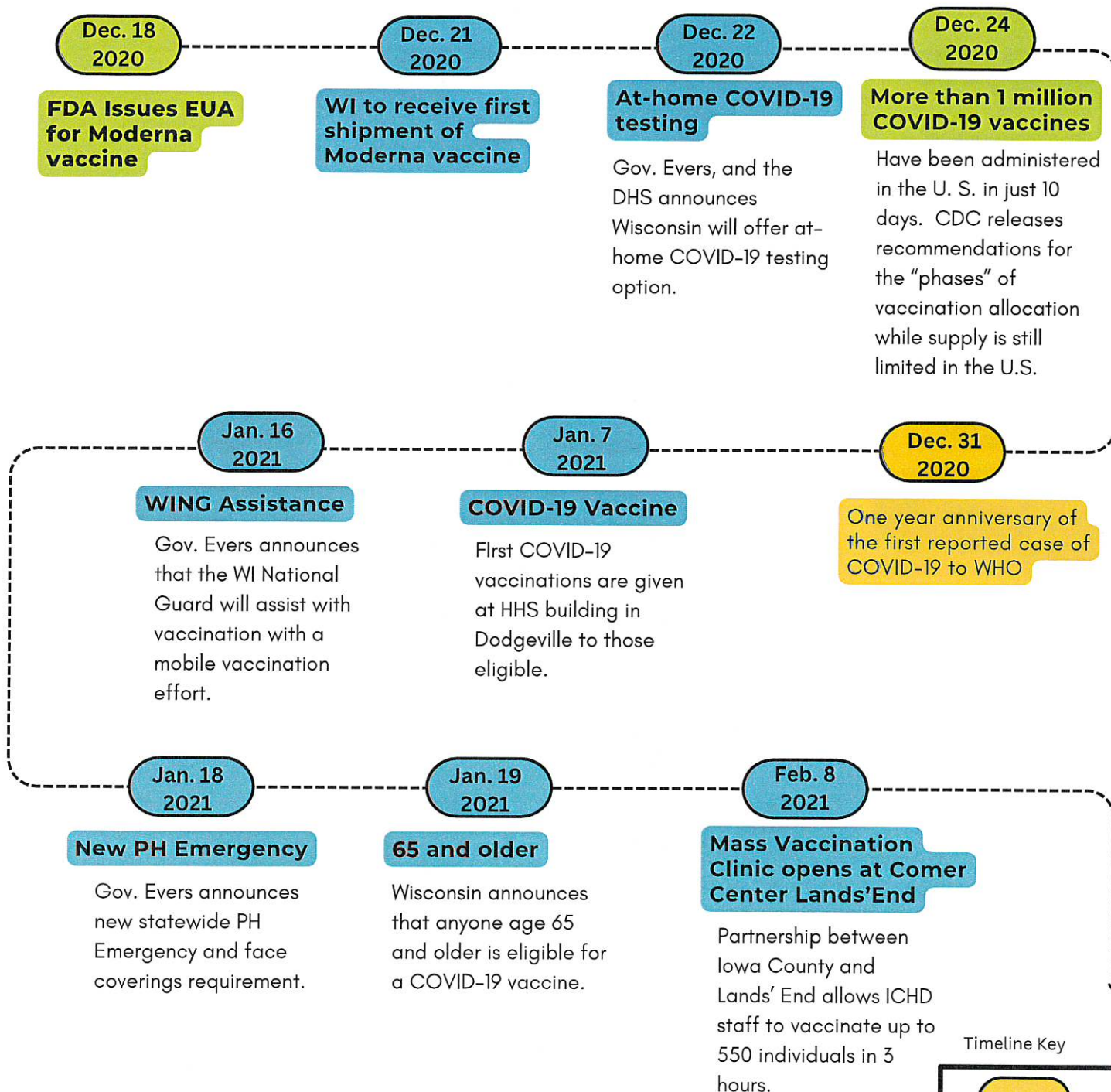
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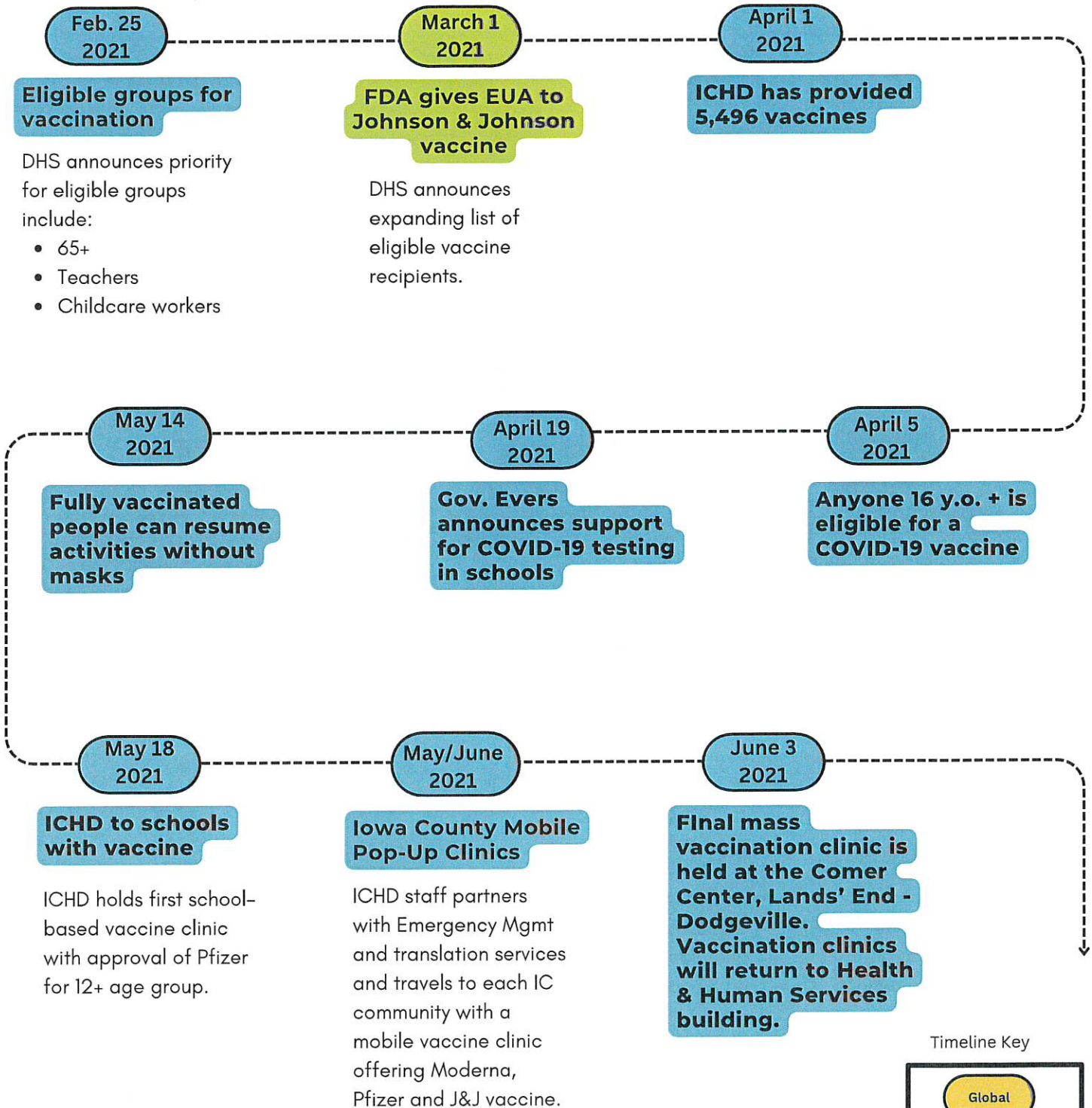
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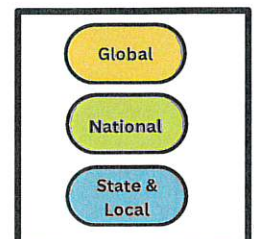
COVID-19 Timeline



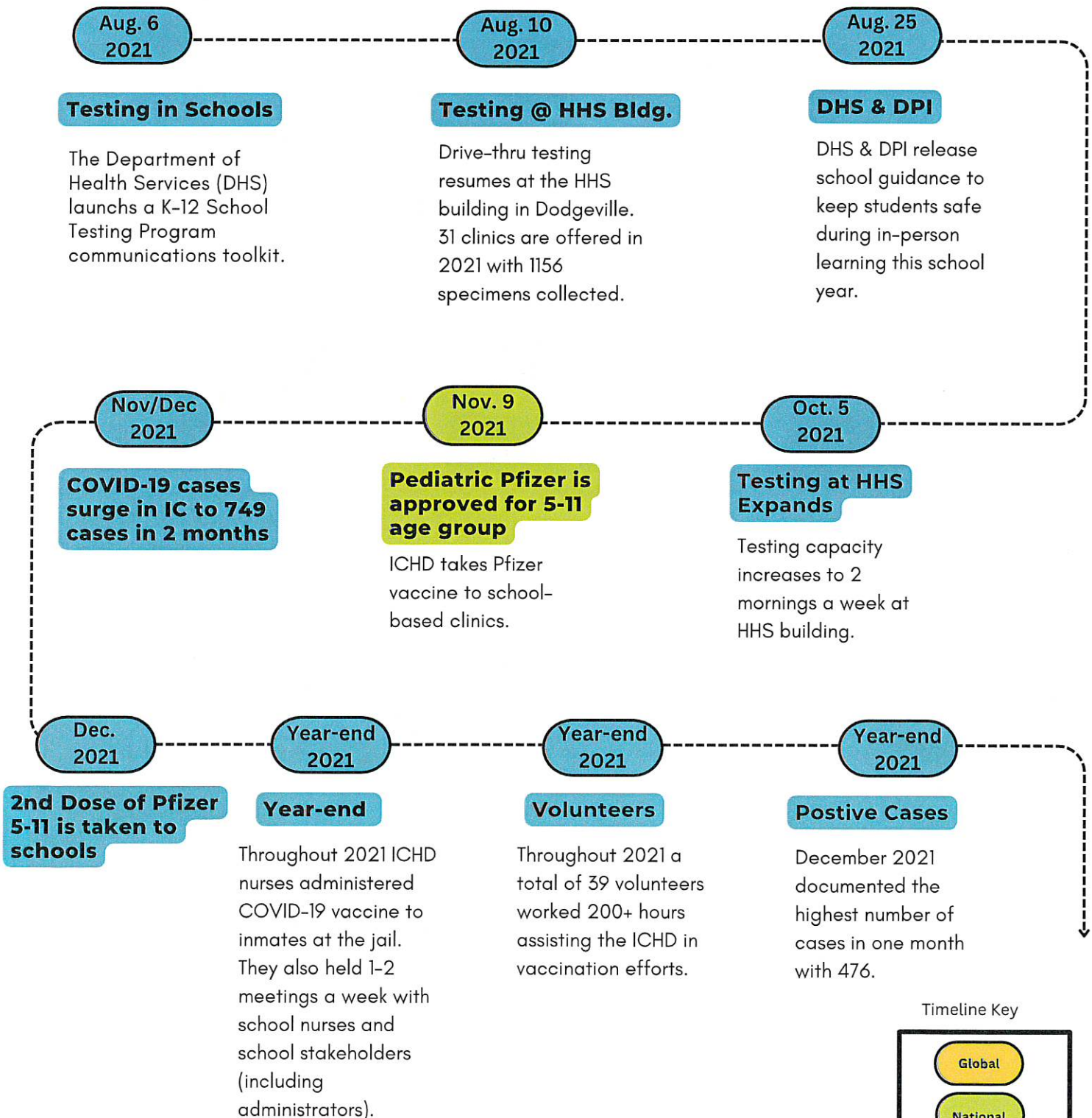
COVID-19 Timeline



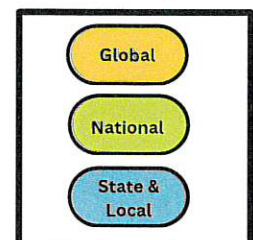
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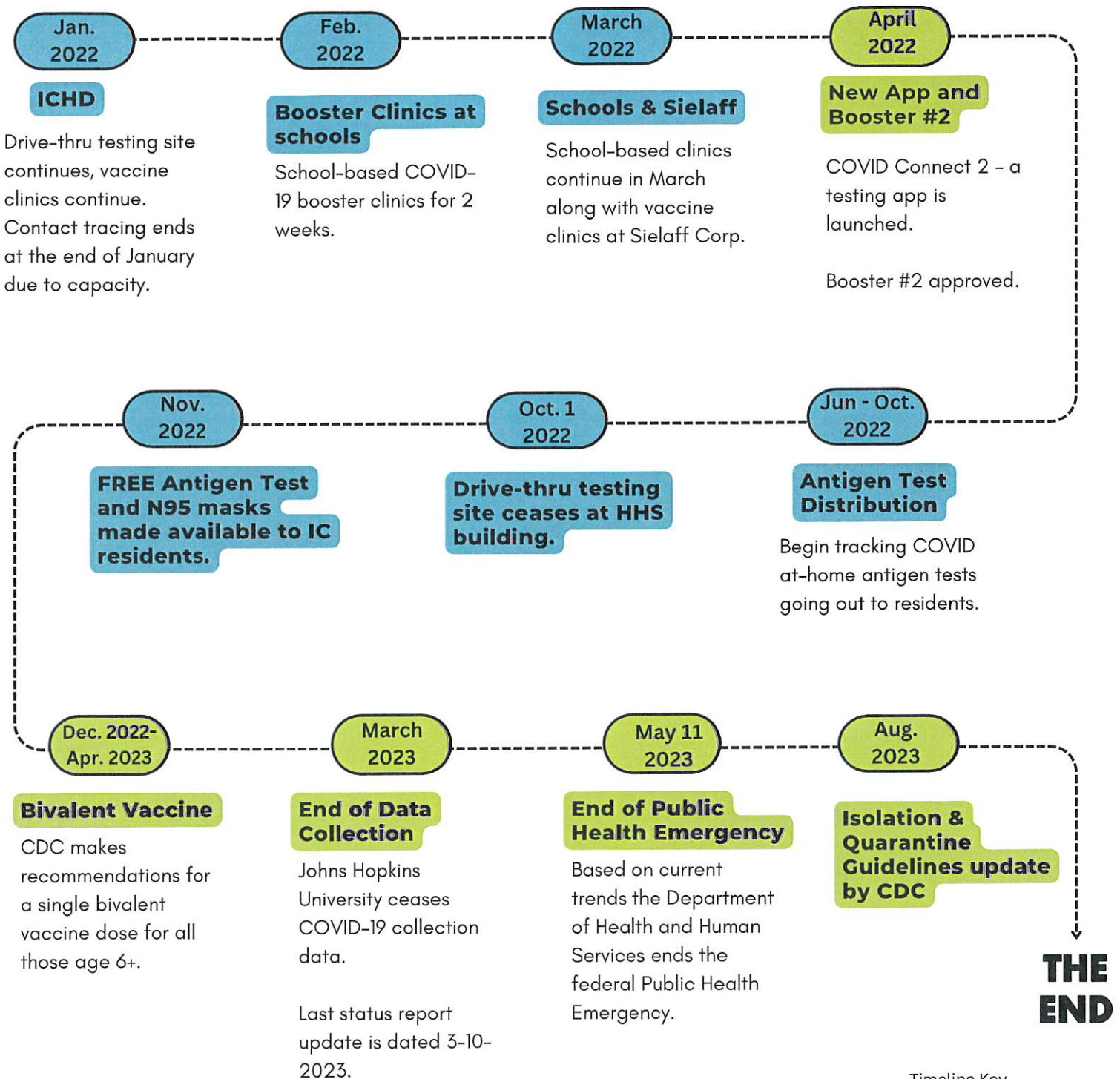
COVID-19 Timeline



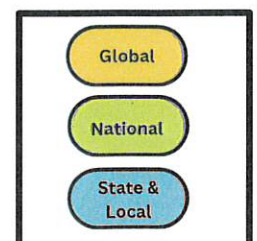
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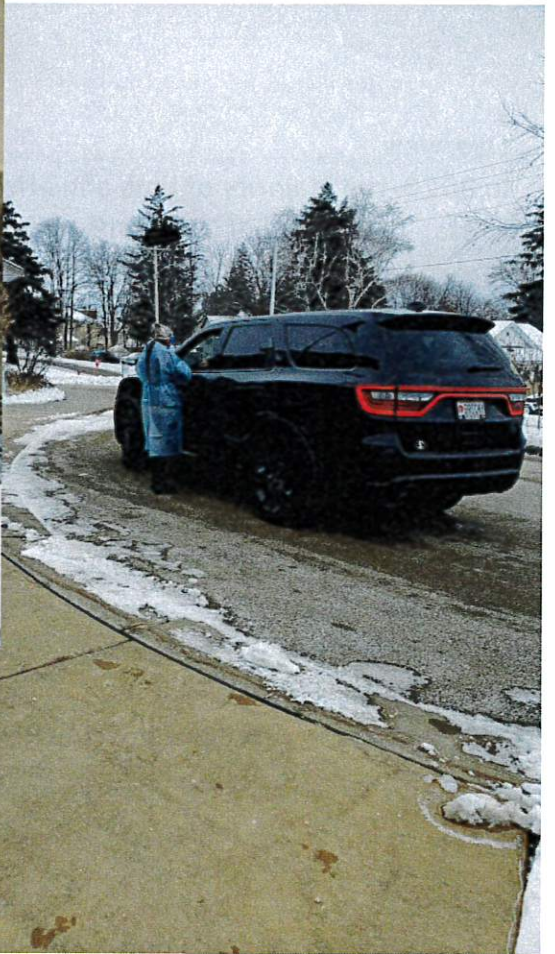


COVID-19 Timeline



Timeline Key





2020



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE BY YEAR

2020

Overview

In 2020, the majority of time and effort at the Iowa County Health Department (ICHD) involved attempting to stop the spread of COVID-19, which resulted in 1,657 COVID-19 cases in Iowa County as of 12/31/2020.

The COVID-19 Pandemic is the largest outbreak of a communicable disease that we have seen in our lifetime. Iowa County reported its first confirmed positive case in mid-March 2020. The first COVID-19 death in Iowa County was on October 14, 2020.

At the outset of the pandemic, Iowa County organized quickly to respond. On March 16, 2020, The Iowa County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was officially opened, although many partner meetings and response measures had already taken place. Iowa County Emergency Management and Upland Hills Health, along with public safety agencies, the coroner's office, funeral directors and Iowa County government were critical partners in the early days.

The Iowa County Health Department took the lead in mitigation, education, contact tracing, COVID-19 testing and disease surveillance, and preparing for the rollout of new and innovative vaccines.

Testing

The ICHD assisted with coordinating who, when, and where people could be tested for COVID-19. In the beginning of the pandemic testing was difficult due to a lack of testing supplies and PPE as well as the limited number of laboratories that were equipped to complete the analysis of the specimens. In the fall, we collaborated with Lafayette County and the Wisconsin National Guard to offer weekly testing between our counties. In addition, collaboration in the southwest region was coordinated to ensure access.

COVID-19 DRIVE THRU TEST SITES

13 testing sites between Iowa and Lafayette Counties were operated from October 6, 2020 through January 14, 2021.

Total Specimens collected = 470

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is the subsequent identification, monitoring, and support of a confirmed or probable case's close contacts who have been exposed to, and possibly infected with, the virus. A close contact is any individual within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more or had direct contact with an infected person. Contact tracing was, at times, very taxing on our department due to the enormous numbers of close contacts that had to be contacted, educated, quarantined, and monitored to stop the spread of the virus. Limited Term Employment (LTE) staff were brought on to assist with contact tracing.

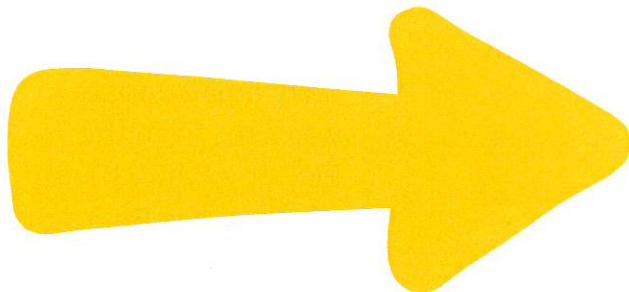
Public Information Campaigns

Iowa County enjoys a positive relationship with print, radio and television media partners. Regular media releases and use of social media was frequent and consistent. The Health Department made themselves available for inquiries and interviews requested by the media as they are a valued and key partner in the response. Keith Hurlbert of IC Emergency Management and Debbie Siegenthaler, Health Officer/Director of the Iowa County Health Department served as Public Information Officers (PIO's).

Communication with partners, stakeholders and the public: A critical element of the response was a broader communication plan. Detailed information can be viewed on Table 1.

Communicating information on the outbreak and preventative response included implementing and messaging important mitigation strategies to key stakeholders and the public. With the abrupt ending of "Safer at Home" by the Supreme Court, the Iowa County Health Department created Forward Iowa County, a plan to safely move Iowa County forward in reopening. In addition, Mass Gathering Guidance was created to recommend safe gathering and reinforce important mitigation measures for businesses, organizations and residents.

ICHD Facebook post on
June 29, 2020



June 29, 2020 **Iowa County COVID-19 Update** 2:00 PM

4	New Positive Test Results in Iowa County
31	Total Positive Test Results in Iowa County
2,337	Negative Test Results in Iowa County
16	Recovered Cases in Iowa County
28,058	Positive Test Results in Wisconsin
527,359	Negative Test Results in Wisconsin
3,407	Hospitalizations in Wisconsin
777	Deaths in Wisconsin



Stay home unless it's absolutely necessary that you go out. Assume that if you leave home, you will come into contact with COVID-19.



Wash your hands regularly and cover your coughs and sneezes



Continue to practice social distancing



Regularly clean high-touched surfaces

Iowa County Health Department

Table 1

Date	What information was shared	Who information was communicated to	Media Platform
See COVID-19 timeline	Emergency Response - Limited supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) - Lab capacity	Partners & Stakeholders	Daily briefings established early in the pandemic in collaboration with IC Emergency Management
	Community Mitigation - Outbreak Management & Control - Contact Tracing - Testing Capacity - Infection Control Guidelines	Public, Partners & Key Stakeholders including: - Upland Hills Health - Long-term care facilities - Assisted living facilities - School district administrators and school nurses - Public safety agencies - Iowa County Corporation Counsel, Iowa County District Attorney, Sheriff's Department - Pharmacies - County department heads - Board of Health and County Board Supervisors	For partners and stakeholders: - Email Updates - Briefings held in collaboration with IC Emergency Management For the public: - Facebook - Website - News media - Press Releases
	General Updates	Board of Health	For several months, a daily email update was sent from the EOC to county board officials, the Board of Health and key stakeholders.

Date	What information was shared	Who information was communicated to	Media Platform
See COVID-19 Timeline	Emergency Response • Contact tracing efforts • Outbreak management & control. • Limited supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) • Lab capacity. • Testing coordination. • Infection control guidelines. • Fit testing for the use of N95 masks provided by our consortium's Environmental Registered Sanitarian, to LTC facilities, school district staff and other responders.	Partners & Stakeholders	Daily Briefings established early in the pandemic in collaboration with IC Emergency Management • Email Updates • Briefings held in collaboration with IC Emergency Management
	Guidance to schools on disease mitigation	School Nurses & School Administrators	Weekly Zoom meetings between Public Health Nurses and School Nurses was an innovative way to sustain consistent communication and trust between the ICHD and schools. Both entities had an opportunity to share challenges and the ICHD shared up-to-date guidance from the Wisconsin DHS and the CDC keeping school nurses abreast of changes.

Data

Critical data proved to be a central piece of our response. Weekly dashboards with both general metrics and school capacity indicators were assembled. These metrics were consistently communicated to the public with informed recommendations, Mass Gathering Guidance and school recommendations for virtual pivots and safer options for reopening. See images below for examples of our published dashboards and response algorithms.

Iowa County COVID-19 Disease Control Metrics



Date from 12/9-12/22	Measure	Iowa County threshold metrics	Iowa County Status
Cases	Less than 5% of tests in Iowa County are positive when averaged across a 14-day period	Green: Below 5% positivity Yellow: 5-10% positivity Red: Above 10% positivity	9.8%
	New cases below a threshold of 5 per day averaged over 14 days	Green: Below 5 cases per day averaged over a 14-day period Yellow: 5-10 cases per day averaged over a 14-day period Red: Greater than 10 cases per day averaged over a 14-day period	10.0%
	Outbreaks are identified and managed	Green: No active outbreaks Yellow: One active outbreak in a facility or employee with under 50 employees/residents Red: Two or more active outbreaks OR one active outbreak in a facility or employee with over 50 employees/residents	10.0%
Testing	Testing supplies and staff facilitate adequate testing for disease control and surveillance	Green: 10+ tests are performed per day, on average, in the past two weeks Yellow: 5-10 tests are performed per day, on average, in the past two weeks Red: <5 tests are performed per day, on average, in the past two weeks	157
	Facility use status: Med surg and K12 campus		10.0%
	Healthcare infrastructure	Staffing status: Trained staff are available or able to adequately care for the volume of patients even with extension techniques Critical supply status: There are at least 14 days worth of critical supplies	10.0%
Regional Healthcare Infrastructure	Regional hospital bed use	Green: <80% bed use Yellow: Between 80-90% bed use Red: Greater than 90% bed use	80.3%
	Contact tracing and lab reporting timeliness	Green: Greater than 80% of all new cases are contacted within 48 hours of results becoming available Yellow: 10-80% of all new cases are contacted within 48 hours of results becoming available Red: Less than 10% of all new cases are contacted within 48 hours of results becoming available	16%
	Community spread	Green: Fewer than 20% of cases in the past two weeks do not have a known route of transmission Yellow: 20-40% of cases in the past two weeks do not have a known route of transmission Red: Greater than 40% of cases in the past two weeks do not have a known route of transmission	40%
Health Department	Iowa County Health Department has adequate staffing to handle day to day operations	Health Department answers yes to the following: Case Volume: Staff are able to manage health department operations. Staffing status: Staff are available to perform health department operations	10.0%
	Capacity for supporting isolation and quarantine when appropriate	Green: Isolation and quarantine support resources are available Yellow: Isolation and quarantine support resources are limited Red: Isolation and quarantine support resources are not available	10.0%
	Iowa County Emergency Management has adequate supplies and functional day to day operations	Green: Iowa County Emergency Management is in agreement that adequate pandemic related supplies are available and day to day operations are routine or non-critical Yellow: Iowa County Emergency Management is in agreement that adequate pandemic related supplies are available and day to day operations are routine or non-critical Red: Iowa County Emergency Management is lacking pandemic related supplies or is attending to other, disaster or other critical matters	10.0%

Updated 12/28/2020

Iowa County Indicators for School Capacity

The Iowa County Health Department, in partnership with Iowa County school districts, will consistently evaluate several identified metrics and indicators. These may evolve over time with experience and new evidenced-based practice as well as guidance from DPI, DHS, WAAA and/or CDC. The indicators shall assist in determining school capacity. All measures reported with data over a 14-day period.

Iowa County Data from 12/9 through 12/22	In-Person Learning	Reduced Capacity	Minimal Capacity
% Positive Tests Five tests as a percentage of total tests	<5%	5-10%	>10%
New Case Rate Five new confirmed cases per 10,000 people	0-9 new confirmed cases	10-29 new confirmed cases	>30 new confirmed cases
Health Care Partner Status Type use status: Med surg and census Staffing status: Trained staff are available			
Healthcare Infrastructure At least 14 days worth of critical supplies			
Regional Health Care Status Regional hospital bed use	Green: <80% bed use	Yellow: Between 80-90% bed use	Red: Greater than 90% bed use
Public Health Status Timeliness with contact tracing and lab reporting			
Health Department Capacity Health Department has adequate staffing to handle day to day operations			
Emergency Management Local EM partner has adequate infrastructure and PPE			
Community Spread Percentage of cases with no identified route of transmission	<20% of cases	20-30% of cases	>30% of cases

In-person learning: In-person instruction with protective measures
Reduced capacity: Local district hybrid or virtual options based on district plan
Minimal capacity: Local district model based on virtual and special needs learning

Iowa County Health Department will work directly with school administrators to determine district and school capacity based on the above indicators. In addition, school specific indicators based on questions answered on page two will inform district, school, grade and classroom response.

Revised 12



Iowa County Schools COVID-19 Response Protocol

Everyone plays a
role in prevention



Practice social
distancing



Wash hands
or sanitize
often



Wear a mask or
face covering

Student or staff member has **ONE** of the following
NEW symptoms

- New or worsening cough
- Temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell

Student or staff member
has **TWO** of the following
new symptoms: Chills,
headache, muscle pain,
nausea, sore throat, runny
nose/congestion, unusual
fatigue

Student or staff member
is **asymptomatic** and has
been in close contact
(within six feet for 15
minutes or more) with
someone who is COVID-
19 positive

1. Student or staff should **stay/go home from school**
2. **If student /staff becomes ill at school, they should be sent home immediately, along with any other household member in the district.**
3. **Alert the school office**
4. **Consider COVID-19 testing** through a healthcare provider or free testing site
Current information regarding free testing sites is available at Wisconsin 211

Alert the school office

While waiting for test results, remain in isolation at home

No test performed and no doctor visit	Positive test	Negative test or alternative diagnosis
• Self-isolate at home for ten days AND • Until fever-free for 24 hours AND • Until symptoms are improving	• Self-isolate at home for ten days AND • Until fever-free for 24 hours AND • Until symptoms are improving • Health department to follow up	• Return to school when fever-free for 24 hours AND • Symptoms are improving • If diagnosed with another illness, refer to the WI Childhood Communicable Diseases Chart, available online

A known close contact (within six feet for 15 minutes or more) **must complete a 14-day quarantine, even if a test result is negative**

Stay home until 14 days after last exposure, check temperatures twice a day and monitor for symptoms

Contact a healthcare provider if symptoms arise

Safe return to school!

Vaccination Efforts

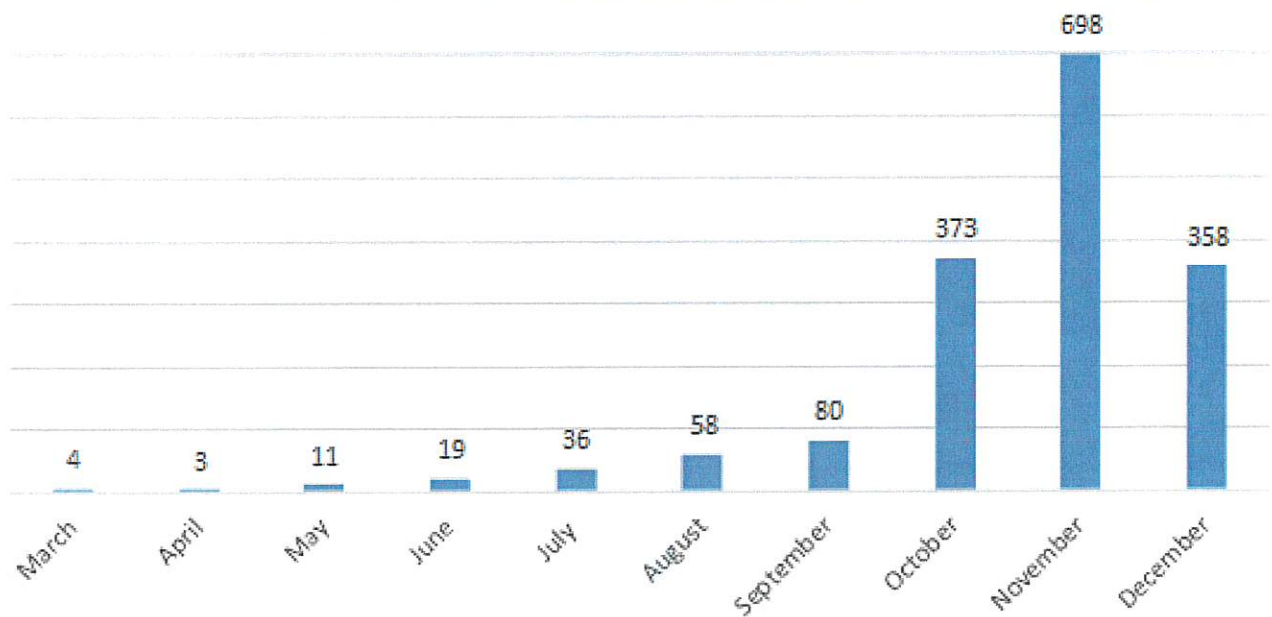
As 2020 came to a close, our health department transitioned from testing to preparing for the rollout of several safe and effective vaccines. The much-anticipated development of vaccines brought a ray of hope and optimism that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic would diminish, or possibly bring an end to the pandemic in the new year (2021).

COVID-19 cases in 2020

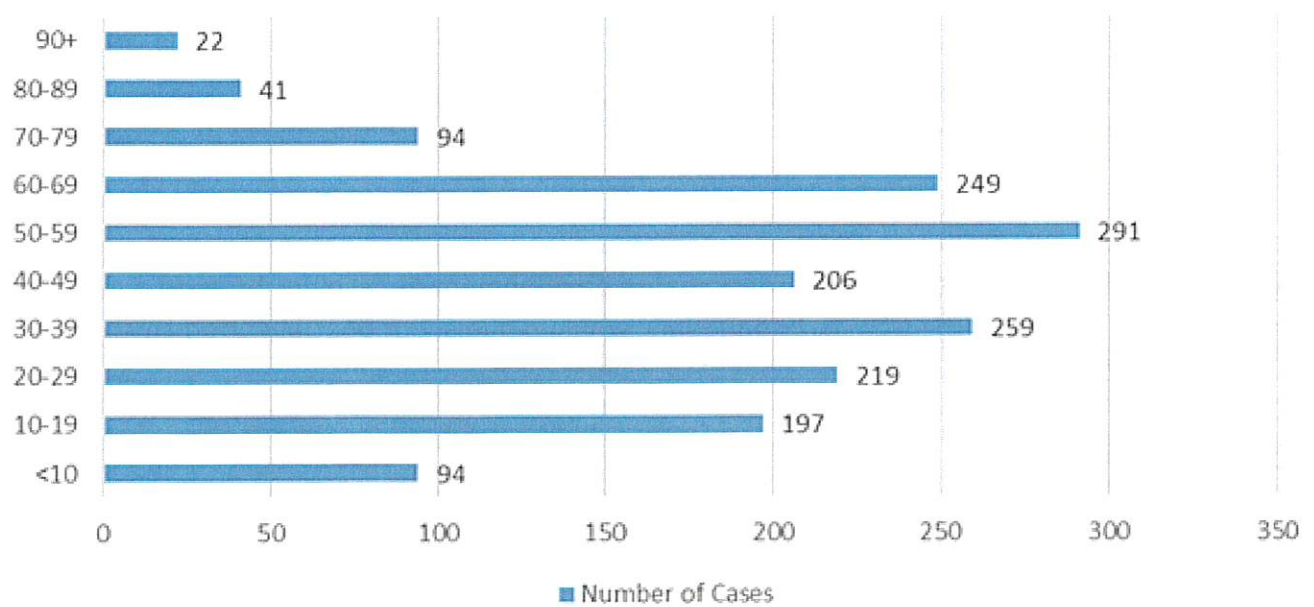
Data obtained and published in the 2020 Annual Report of the Iowa County Health Department. See graphics below.

Case Counts - the staff of the Iowa County Health Department tracked case counts daily on an Excel spreadsheet. The data collected on the spreadsheet allowed the staff to monitor and track positive cases and to identify the point in which each case was no longer infectious.

Cases by Month



COVID-19 CASES BASED ON AGE March - December 2020



The Response Through the Eyes of Community Partners

In 2024 we asked a number of our community partners to reflect on the pandemic through the lens of their personal and professional lives.

We asked them to share their experiences, most significant challenges their organization faced, including the most impactful stressors, as well as the resilience they witnessed within their organization and community. Finally, we asked for personal stories that documented the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Here is what they had to say.....

From the perspective of a Public Health Nurse

"We didn't have enough staff to cover the load of the work. We were completely overwhelmed. We experienced a lot of push back from the community on COVID in general which made the work that needed to happen that much more difficult.

We were calling COVID positives, contact tracing, calling all the contacts, and continuously repeating ourselves to each person about the most updated guidelines.... and then the guidelines would change at the drop of a hat. BUT- our staff never gave up. We showed up every single day to push through and do what we knew needed to do to save lives. We were truly dedicated in a time of such turmoil and sadness.

I had my first child on April 2nd, 2020. Which was less than a month after COVID was declared a pandemic. You could say that this Public Health Nurse was a complete nervous wreck bringing a newborn into this newly pandemic world. As you can imagine, being a brand new mom and a Public Health Nurse during a pandemic isn't for the faint of heart. However, in darkness there is light--- our little girl, who now is 4, gave our family and friends something positive in such a dark time."

***Leah Walrack, RN, Public Health Nurse
Lafayette County Health Department
Darlington, Wisconsin***

From the perspective of an EMS Chief

“Responding to all the extra calls due to COVID-19, staffing, hospital bed shortages, longer distance to transport patients to get care, supply chain disruptions.

I think the most stress was adjusting the ambulance schedule for ill staff members that were taken out for 10 days initially. Supply chain issues for medical supplies.

Our combination full-time and volunteer staff done a superb job in maintaining the response level that we needed within the communities.”

Brian Cushman

EMS Chief

Dodgeville Area Ambulance Service

From the perspective of a police lieutenant

***“Staffing and obtaining reliable information.
Accounting for staffing issues due to isolations.”***

Brandon Wilhelm

Lieutenant/Exposure Control Officer

Dodgeville Police Department

NOTE: Brandon submitted the full COVID-19 After-Action Report for the Dodgeville Police Department, and it can be found as an addendum to the report.



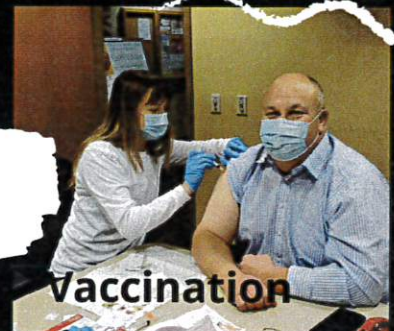
MASKING



TESTING



2021
working together to
mitigate the effects of
COVID-19



Vaccination

2021



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE BY YEAR

2021

19

Iowa County Health Department 2021 Annual report

COVID-19 TIMELINE

- January 7, 2021: ICHD had their first vaccination clinic at the HHS building.
- February 4, 2021: Iowa County reaches 1,800 confirmed cases.
- February 8 , 2021: ICHD opened the Lands' End Vaccination Site at the Comer Center.
- April 1, 2021: ICHD provided 5,496 vaccinations.
- May 18 , 2021: ICHD had their first school-based vaccination clinic.
- June 18, 2021: Iowa County averaged 0.14 cases per day, the lowest average for the year.
- October 14, 2021: ICHD opened a booster vaccination clinic at the Lands' End child care center.
- November 9, 2021: COVID-19 vaccinations began for 5-11 year-olds.
- December 2021: Documented the highest number of cases in one month with 476.

2021

Overview

In 2021, the pandemic response continued to consume the majority of time and operations of the ICHD staff. In addition to providing testing, continuing disease investigation, and delivering guidance to our community, we were also coordinating and administering vaccinations as another tool to help decrease the effects of the virus. Beginning in March of 2020 at the onset of the pandemic and continuing into 2021, the Iowa County Emergency Management (ICEM) team continued to work side-by-side with the Health Department as a key response partner. In addition to the ICEM team, other critical partners included:

- Upland Hills Health
- Iowa County school districts
- Long-term care facilities
- Daycares
- Public Safety Agencies
- Coroner's Office
- Funeral Directors
- Iowa County Government

Excerpt from the ICHD 2020 Annual Report

27

2021 Programs and Services

8. Maintain a Competent Public Health Workforce

Wis. Stat. § 251.06(3)(e)

A local health officer shall...Appoint all necessary subordinate personnel, assure that they meet appropriate qualifications and have supervisory power over all subordinate personnel. Any public health nurses and sanitarians hired for the local health department shall meet any qualification requirements established in rules promulgated by the department.

Limited Term Employees (LTE)

A complex multi-month response involves complex operations far beyond the normal capacity of the Health Department. The capacity added in 2020 continued into 2021. Many Public Health Nurses joined the staff as a Limited-term Employee. These LTE nurses added essential capacity with vaccination and testing operations as well as contact tracing. In addition, two Public Health Nurse Project positions were approved and added in the fall of 2020 and continued on in 2021. These were essential in assisting with the operations noted above as stakeholder coordination with long term care facilities and school districts. In addition, the Iowa County Department of Social Services lent several team members to staff the EOC and assist with contact tracing efforts as well. Also listed are our Emergency Management partners who have been absolutely essential to our operations and success.

PHN Project Positions

Carmen Carpenter
Kaylee Litchfield

LTEs

Kelly Deterding
Sue Matye
Carly Tibbits
Judi Ascher
Elizabeth Bothfeld
Cara Biddick
Janet Brown
Maria Felland

LTEs

Kathy Honerbaum
Denise Hummel
Lynn McMahon
Marion Van Asseldonk
Ashley Olson
Debra Short
Cathy Tanner

Iowa County Social Services

Nohe Caygill
Janet Butteris

Emergency Management Department Staff

Keith Hurlbert, EM Director
Amanda Gardner, Assistant

Testing

COVID-19 Community Testing

The Iowa County Health Department continued to operate and assist in partner testing coordination efforts, although the primary efforts were placed on vaccine administration. After closing the testing operation in January of 2021, the testing operation re-opened in August of 2021 with a drive-thru COVID-19 testing site at the Health & Human Services building staffed by ICHD staff and LTE staff.

COVID-19 Drive-Thru Tests

In 2021, the Iowa County Health Department provided 31 drive-thru testing clinics at the Health & Human Services building.

Total specimens collected = 1,156

Iowa County Health Department COVID-19 testing site - 2021

The testing initiative of 2020 concluded as the vaccine rollout began in January 2021. With the surge of COVID-19 variants (Delta and Omicron) in the late summer of 2021, the testing site at Iowa County Health Department resumed as a drive through site at the Health and Human Services building. During the week of 10/5/21 the site expanded to 2 mornings each week and was staffed by the Health Department staff along with LTE nurses.



Contact Tracing

Contact tracing efforts continued in 2021. With the assistance of LTE staff, all positive cases were contacted, supported and educated. All ICHD staff shared an Excel document that tracked all positive cases and key information points on each case.

As the CDC changed guidance for isolation and quarantine, the ICHD pivoted their patient education and created tools to communicate the ever-changing guidance (see table-right).

NEW COVID-19 ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE RECOMMENDATIONS

IF YOU TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 (ISOLATE)

EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF VACCINATION STATUS.

• Stay home for 5 days.

• If you have no symptoms or your symptoms have improved after 5 days, you can leave your house on day 6.

• Continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days.

If you have a fever, continue to stay home until your fever resolves.

IF YOU WERE EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WITH COVID-19 (QUARANTINE)

IF YOU:

Have been boosted

OR

Completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine within the last 6 months

OR

Completed the primary series of J&J vaccine within the last 2 months

• Wear a mask around others for 10 days.

• Test on day 5, if possible.

If you develop symptoms get a test and stay home.

IF YOU WERE EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WITH COVID-19 (QUARANTINE)

IF YOU:

Completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine over 6 months ago and are not boosted

OR

Completed the primary series of J&J over 2 months ago and are not boosted

OR

Are unvaccinated

• Stay home for 5 days. After that continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days.

• If you can't quarantine you must wear a mask for 10 days. • Test on day 5 if possible.

If you develop symptoms get a test and stay home.

2021

Public Information Campaigns

In 2021 messaging about vaccine availability was a crucial part of our information campaigns. It was critical to inform the public of the vaccine rollout, inform them of eligibility requirements and the process of scheduling a vaccine. We were given guidelines from the WI DHS and CDC about eligibility for the receiving the vaccine. Monitoring eligibility and equity with scheduling was a time-consuming endeavor managed by the staff.

An excerpt from the January 14, 2021, press release from the ICHD Health Officer/Director, stressing the importance of patience and understanding as we worked tirelessly to vaccinate eligible persons.....

“Additionally, we understand people are eager to get immunized and have questions about when they will be able to do so. Iowa County Health Department asks for residents’ patience as we first vaccinate Phase 1A group. We will share information widely when we are authorized to start vaccinating other populations. Please keep up to date with the vaccine roll-out through press releases, the Iowa County COVID-19 website and/or the ICHD Facebook page. Please understand that the Health Department is not keeping lists of the general public wishing to receive the vaccine. Once again, we ask for your patience and understanding in this process. Our goal is to ensure everyone in Iowa County is vaccinated as soon as possible”.

In addition to communicating with our county residents, the Health Department staff maintained ongoing communication with partners, stakeholders previously mentioned in this report. Included in these communication efforts were:

- One to two weekly Zoom meetings with school nurses. These meetings provided a platform for the HD staff to update school nurses on COVID-19 policies and procedures as they were made available by CDC and DHS, to offer a time to collaborate on individual case questions, and plan for vaccine rollouts. It served as a forum for school nurses to collaborate with one another which proved to be a highly effective communication platform, providing consistency of communication between schools and within the county. This platform also allowed the HD nurses to serve as a daily resource for school nurses, helping them to navigate the ongoing changes that the pandemic presented.
- “School Stakeholder” meetings, facilitated by the Health Officer/Director with additional HD staff in attendance were developed as a platform for keeping school administrators and nurses up to date on the most recent data on COVID-19 coming from the state of WI DHS and CDC.
- Continuation of consistent and regular communication with several stakeholder groups. This communication took the form of email updates and Zoom meetings.
- Regular briefings with these entities allowed for updating groups on the rapidly changing guidelines and recommendations. The following topics were covered in briefings:
 - Contact tracing
 - Outbreak management and control
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Testing coordination
 - Infection control guidelines
 - Guidance to school districts on keeping staff and students safe
 - Vaccination rollout and eligibility criteria

2021

Community Mitigation - communicating mitigation efforts to the public, partners and stakeholders continued to play a critical role in 2021. These mitigation recommendations included:

- Physical distancing
- Hand hygiene
- Improved sanitation measures
- Use of cloth coverings and face masks
- Getting tested based on current guidelines
- Getting vaccinated

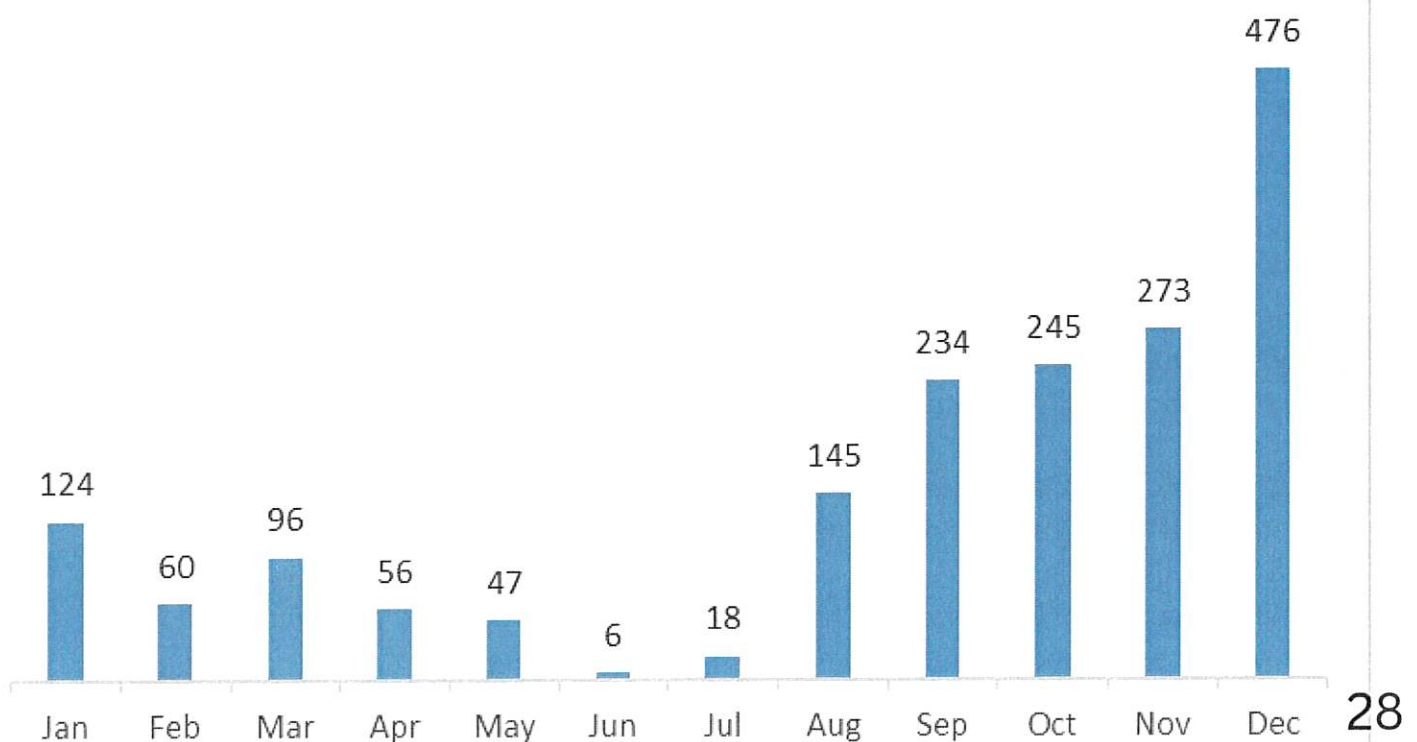
The Mass Gathering and Mitigation Guidance created in 2021 was updated several times within the year to recommend safe gathering guidelines and reinforce important mitigation measures for businesses, organizations and private residents.



Data

Data continued to be a critical part of keeping the community and our partners updated on key metrics. The weekly dashboard with both general metrics and the school capacity indicators were consistently communicated to partners, stakeholders and the public. These metrics informed guidance and recommendations, including the Mass Gathering guidance, school recommendations for virtual pivots and safer operations, and general functions and events in addition to tracking case counts.

COVID-19 cases surge during the Fall of 2021



2021



Upland Hills Health

July 2, 2021 · 🌐

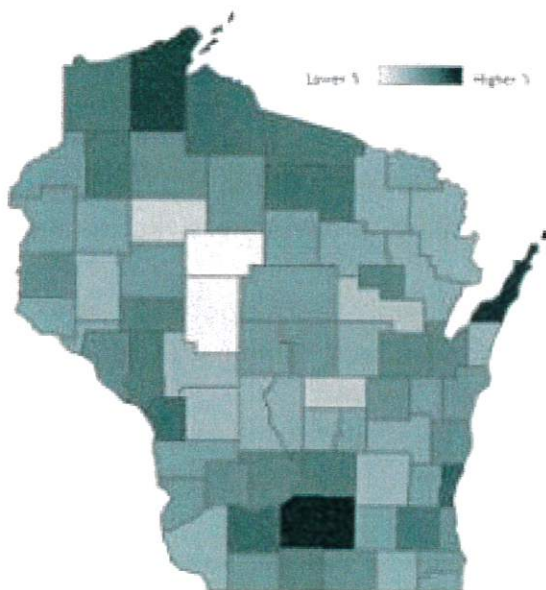
...

Go Iowa County! More than 67% of adults in Iowa County are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and approximately 58% of the full population of Iowa County is vaccinated! We are among the top 10 counties in Wisconsin.

Remember, each Monday you can call Upland Hills Health at 930.8000 to find out which clinics will have vaccine that week, or follow our partners at [Iowa County Health Department](#) to catch their pop up clinics!

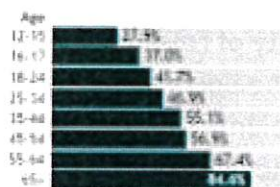
Percent of Wisconsin residents who have received at least one dose by county

Click a county to filter data

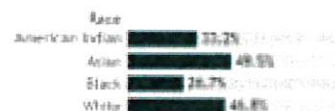


Percent of Wisconsin residents who have received at least one dose

The orange represents the population for whom the vaccine is authorized. The gray indicates the population under 12 years of age for whom the vaccines are not authorized.



18.4% of records were reported without sex.



*1.8% of records reported a race of 'Other'.

*1.2% of records reported an unknown race.



*5.6% of records were reported without ethnicity.

[View more data on racial and ethnic disparities in Wisconsin](#)

Iowa County Health Department

Published by Debbie Schilling Siegenthaler · July 1, 2021 · 🌐

We hit 58.2% today of Iowa County residents with at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine 🥳

NEW THIS WEEK: The Department of Health Services is now providing specif... [See more](#)

Facebook post put out by Upland Hills Health. This image is a snapshot of the WI DHS COVID-19 interactive data page that reflected vaccine uptake by county.

MASS VACCINATION CLINIC ROLLOUT

JANUARY 7, 2021

Vaccination Efforts

Following months of planning, logistics and awaiting approval and direction from the FDA, CDC and the WI DHS, the COVID-19 vaccine rollout began at the Health and Human Services building on January 7, 2021, with the Moderna vaccine.

The choice to begin with the Moderna vaccine was an intentional decision based on the storage needs of the Moderna vaccine and its availability. We had concerns about the appropriate storage capacity for the Pfizer vaccine at this point in time. The issue of limited vaccine availability at the state level was managed on a weekly basis with the need to balance vaccine appointments with the number of vaccines we would request and subsequently receive.

It quickly became evident that the vaccination operation being held at the HHS building would need to be expanded to meet the needs of the county residents desiring vaccination. A partnership with the Lands' End corporation was developed between the ICHD, ICEM and Lands' End to allow for a mass vaccination site on the Lands' End Campus in the Comer Activity Center. This space allowed the capacity to vaccinate up to 550 people in a 3-hour period while keeping all participants socially distanced and observed for the required 15-minute post-vaccine time period.

In collaboration with the ICEM team we engaged a robust team of volunteers (ICEM and ICHD managed their own volunteer scheduling and supervision) that faithfully assisted at every mass vaccination clinic that we held. Volunteers held a variety of roles including:

Parking assistance, assistance into the building for those requiring help, registration assistance, assistance with guiding vaccine recipients through the vaccination process, helping with supply re-stocking and sanitizing stations/chairs/clipboards.

In early June 2021, as vaccine demand decreased, the clinic site moved from Lands' End back to the HHS Building where they continued on a smaller scale.

We adjusted the schedule (days of the week and hours of the clinic) as needed based on demand.

In October 2021 with the approval of the first COVID vaccine boosters and the recommended regimen provided by the FDA, CDC and WI DHS, Lands' End once again opened the doors of their vacated Day Care Center. The ICHD staff, LTE's and volunteers provided another mass vaccination clinic site that continued through December of 2021.

**COVID-19
VACCINE**

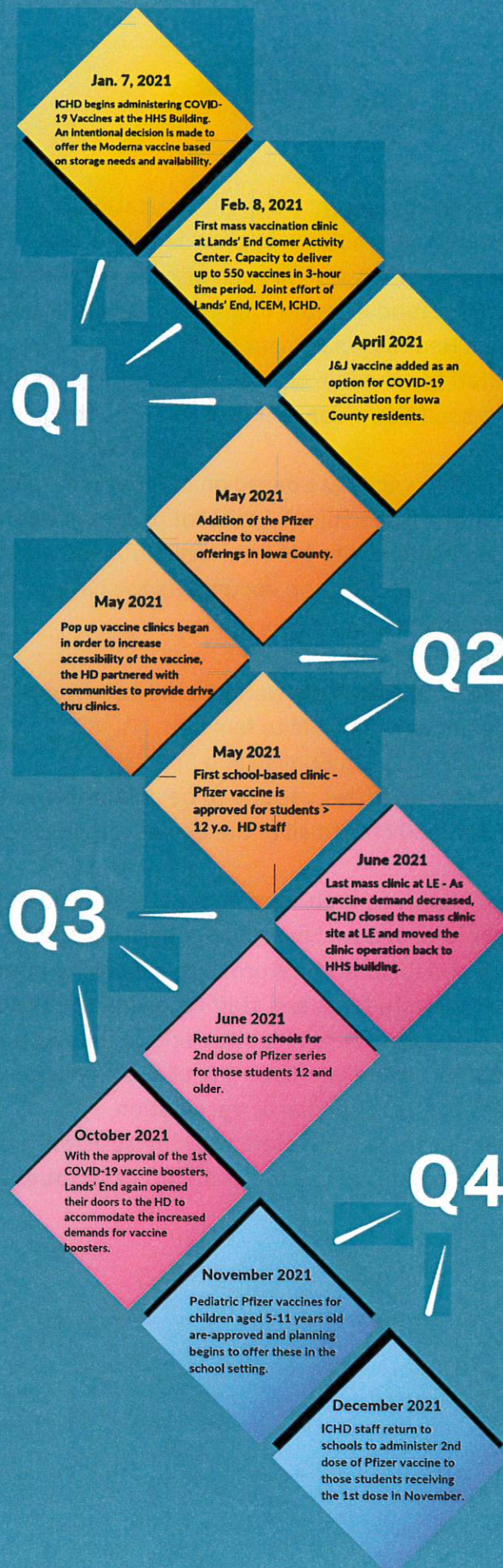
We are currently able to offer COVID-19 vaccine appointments to individuals in Tier 1A which includes Health Care Professionals, EMS, law enforcement and firefighters. If you serve in one of these areas please email healthinfo@iowacounty.org and we will forward a registration link to you.

If you are not currently eligible for Tier 1A but are interested in a vaccine, please visit our website at <https://iowacounty.org> or our Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/iowacountyhealthdepartment.com> for the most current information on vaccine availability.

For specific questions, please email healthinfo@iowacounty.org.

IOWA
COUNTY
WISCONSIN

2021 MASS VACCINE ROLLOUT



2021

School-based Vaccine Clinics

In **May of 2021** in anticipation of the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer vaccine for 12-15 year-olds, the ICHD staff created a framework to provide school-based vaccine clinics. We collaborated with school nurses and office staff in each district; partnering with them to provide the vaccine to students in the school setting with the ultimate goal of improving access to the vaccine for families of school-aged children. Health Department staff:

- Collaborated with school staff to schedule clinics- dates, times, location within the school building.
- Instructed school nurses to send home consent forms in order to gain understanding of how many vaccines were requested.
- Scheduled LTE and ICHD staff to vaccinate based on number of requested vaccines.
- Scheduled additional help of the Department Assistant or other staff member to assist with paperwork and entering vaccinations into the Wisconsin Immunization Registry (WIR).
- Provided school nurses with information and documents to share with families.
- Provided the Pfizer EUA document.
- Provided the vaccine consent form.
- Developed an FAQ's document to aide in answering family questions proactively and requested that school nurses make this document available to families.
- All documentation was provided in both English and Spanish.
- Returned to school for 2nd dose of Pfizer vaccine to be administered to those students/staff receiving the first dose in **June 2021** with all of the above activities repeated for scheduling the 2nd visit.
- In **November of 2021** Pfizer approved their vaccine for students aged 5-11. Once again the above plan was mobilized and school-based vaccine clinics were scheduled.
- In **December of 2021** - LTE and ICHD staff returned to schools to administer the second dose of the Pediatric Pfizer vaccine to those students and staff receiving the first dose in November.
- In order to provide alternative dates for families needing to follow up with either the first or second dose of Pfizer, the ICHD staff provided two Saturday clinics at the Iowa County Health Department to provide additional access points for pediatric vaccination.
- In addition to COVID-19 vaccines, the ICHD staff, with the assistance of the LTE staff, administered 587 influenza vaccines in the school setting in the month of **October 2021**.

ICHD - 2021 SCHOOL-BASED VACCINATION CLINICS

BARNEVELD

- May - **54** COVID-19
- June - **45** COVID-19
- Oct - **57** Flu vax
- Nov - **70** COVID-19 (5-11)

DODGEVILLE

- May - **77** COVID-19
- June - **71** COVID-19
- Oct - **214** Flu vax
- Nov - **76** COVID-19 (5-11)

HIGHLAND

- May - **26** COVID-19
- Oct - **87** Flu vax
- Nov - **17** COVID-19 (5-11)
- Dec - **17** COVID-19 (5-11)

HOLLANDALE

- Nov - **40** COVID-19 (5-11)
- Dec - **35** COVID-19 (5-11)

IOWA-GRANT

- May - **26** COVID-19
- Oct - **114** Flu vax
- Nov - **76** COVID-19 (5-11)
- Dec - **71** COVID-19 (5-11)

MINERAL POINT

- May - **78** COVID-19
- June - **86** COVID-19
- Oct - **98** Flu vax
- Nov - **202** COVID-19 (5-11)



Total # COVID-19 and Flu vaccines administered in the school setting: 1672

ST JOES

- May - **8** COVID-19
- June - **10** COVID-19
- Oct - **17** Flu vax

ICHD Provides School-based COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics

MAY 2021
APPROVED USE
OF PFIZER FOR
12-15 Y.O.

MAY-JUNE 2021
SCHOOL-BASED
COVID-19
CLINICS

JULY - SATURDAY
BACK-TO-SCHOOL
VACCINE CLINIC

OCT 2021
SCHOOL-
BASED
FLU
CLINICS

NOV-DEC 2021
SCHOOL-BASED
COVID-19
CLINICS

DEC. 2021
2 DAYS OF
PEDIATRIC
CLINICS OVER
SCHOOL BREAK

In May of 2021 in anticipation of the EUA for the Pfizer vaccine for 12-15 year olds, the Iowa County Health Department created a framework to provide the vaccine in school-based clinics. School nurses were contacted and it was determined that those schools desiring a school-based clinic would be placed on a schedule. The school nurses were provided with written resources to share with families including a "FAQ's" document prepared by the Health Department, Pfizer EUA documentation and consent forms to share with families. LTE staff was scheduled to provide staffing alongside the Health Department staff for these clinics. ICHD collaborated with school office staff for the physical logistics of the clinics.

PREP

513
Vaccines

587
Vaccines

668
Vaccines

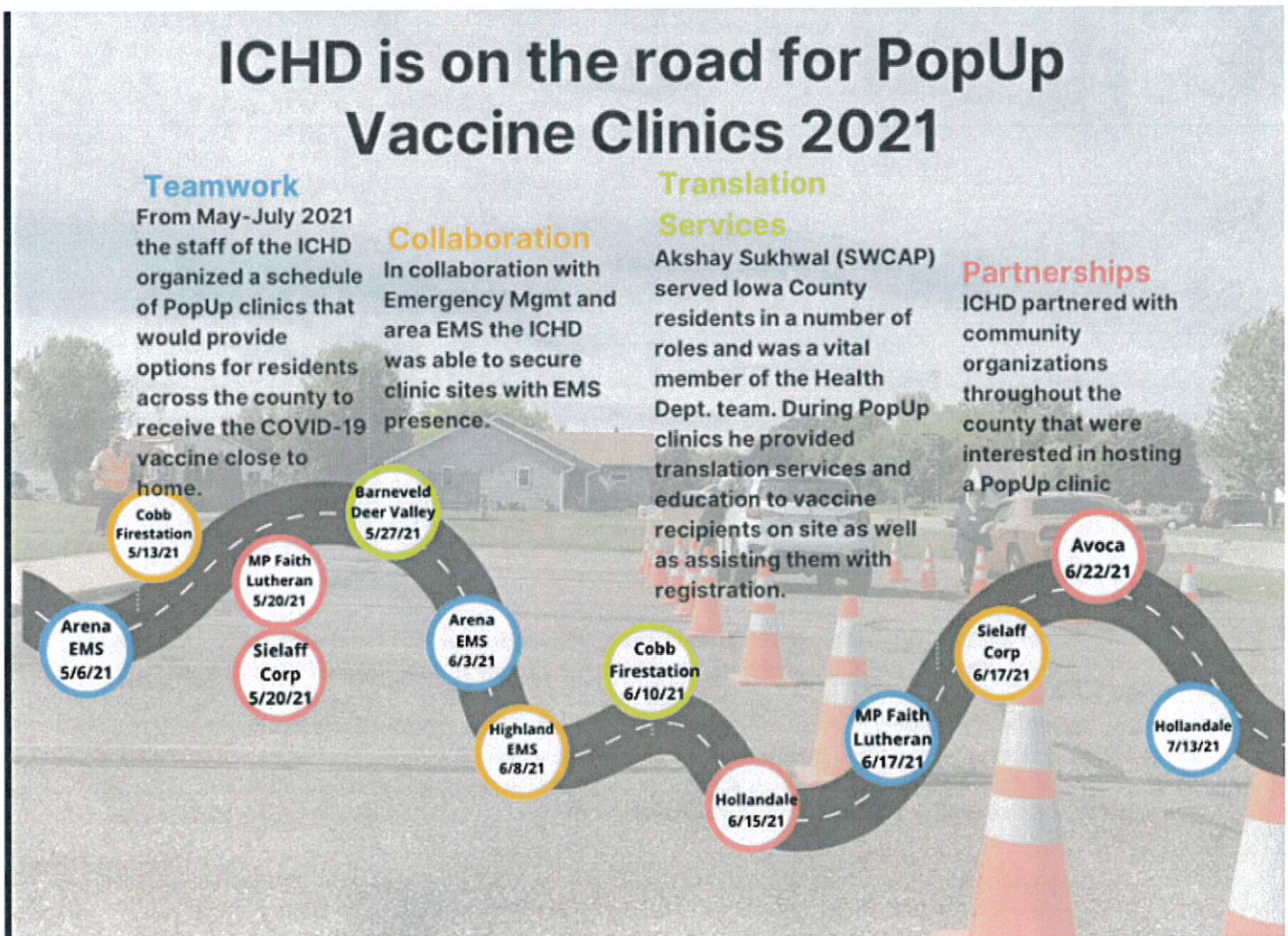
21
Vaccines

2021

Pop-Up Vaccine Clinics

When considering transportation and other barriers to accessing the COVID-19 vaccine, the Health Department partnered with many local Iowa County communities to provide easy access to the COVID-19 vaccine in **May and June of 2021**. Details for each clinic included:

- ICHD staff, LTE staff and ICEM staff traveling to each community twice to offer both doses of the vaccine.
- A mobile clinic was set up in each designated location (i.e. church parking lot, EMS parking lot).
- Moderna, Pfizer and J&J vaccines were offered to the public at each clinic.
- Evening clinics were provided.
- Pop-Up clinics were a “drive-thru” model that provided an opportunity for post vaccination observation as recommended by FDA, CDC and WI DHS.
- ICHD partnered with ICEM who provided signage, cones, tents and assisted us with choosing locations in each community.
- Partners from Southwest Community Action Program (SWCAP) worked alongside the vaccination staff to provide translation services.



Volunteer Effort

The volunteer effort in Iowa County throughout the vaccine effort was an integral part of the success of vaccine dissemination.

Volunteers signed up through a county website and were vetted and managed by the staff of the Health Department.

Right:

Excerpt from the 2021 Annual Report of the Iowa County Health Department.

18

Iowa County Health Department 2021 Annual report

SILENT HEROES-VOLUNTEERS

Our ability to quickly and effectively provide vaccinations to our community was largely due to the help of our volunteers. On behalf of Iowa County, we recognize the tremendous work of our volunteers, the silent heroes in this pandemic.

Volunteer Hours Worked

200+

Number of Volunteers

39

Thank you to...

Alan Holter	Jerry Schlimgen	Peggy Jones
Audrey Rue	June Meudt	Rachel Hartline
Bruce Paull	Karen Bakken	Randy Witt
Carol Anderson	Kathleen Murphy	Regina Fisher
Coleman	Kathryn DeVoss	Richard Willauer
Connie Johnson	Linda Pittz	Roger Stewart
David Meudt	Linda Schaaf	Sarah Hanson
Diane Wilkinson	Lisa Stewart	Sarah Phillipson
Diann Wenger	Marcia Kendall	Shawn Thompson
Donna Paull	Mary "Pat" Yanna	Steve Johnson
Gayl Stewart	Mary Graham	Sue Steudel
Gayle Jebbia	Nancy Schmit	Tom DeVoss
Jeffery Grayson	Olivia Jebbia	Tom Howard

Thank You

The Response Through the Eyes of a Community Partner

In 2024 we asked a number of our community partners to reflect on the pandemic through the lens of their personal and professional lives.

We asked them to share their experiences, most significant challenges their organization faced, including the most impactful stressors, as well as the resilience they witnessed within their organization and community. Finally, we asked for personal stories that documented the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Here is what they had to say.....

From the perspective of a Public Health Nurse

“Ever changing information and guidance was a major challenge. Once the vaccine came out, SO many people wanted the vaccine and we had limited supply, so we had lengthy waiting lists which was difficult to manage as many had received the vaccine somewhere else by the time we called them back. We had to halt other public health programming. News and media would know the next update in guidelines and vaccines before HDs would know sometimes.

Stressors included ever changing information and being overcome by explaining the process to the public. Differences of opinion was overcome by education, remaining calm, and utilization of de-escalation practices. Every day was filled with COVID and the repetitive nature of dealing with COVID every day was exhausting. First amendment auditor - overcome by remaining calm.

I received a card from a patient who got their first COVID vaccine that said, "thank you for saving my life." We had a little boy that on his birthday, when he was finally of age, all he wanted for his birthday was a COVID shot. 150 people wanting to volunteer to help out. Staff and community members struggling with mental health. Giving birth and not knowing if your husband would be able to be there.”

***Carly Tibbits, RN, Public Health Nurse
Iowa County Health Department
Dodgeville, Wisconsin***

From the perspective of those working in the field of mental health

Unfortunately, what we do are in person such as (the fundraisers) selling raffle tickets, bowling tournament, memorial walk, (Community Support) Grief Support Groups & Sports nights at schools so we were extremely limited on offering services to the community.

The organization took a huge financial hit because we were still mailing out resources for in school lunches while kids were home and farmers businesses were not taking anything in financially. COVID was a critical time for people's mental health so we did all we could do with our limited funds. However, it set us back in a way we have found hard to recover."

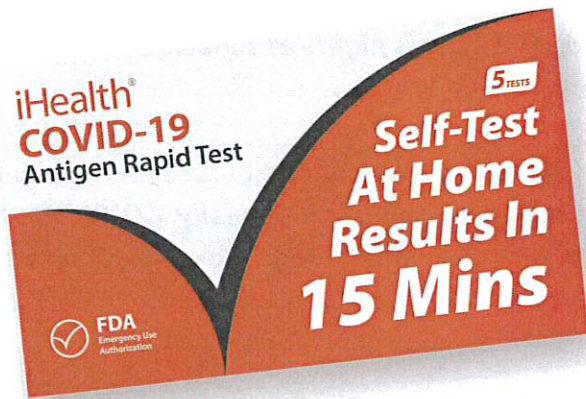
Susan Springer
Outreach Coordinator
Suicide Prevention Southwest Wisconsin

"Reaching target populations for prevention outreach. Reading faces was difficult with masking and virtual meetings. It's also much easier to connect with people at in-person meetings. Once the connection is made, the virtual meetings are fine.

I really didn't experience major stressors other than the lack of events to reach people mentioned in question 4. Others may have had to adjust to not being able to walk down the hall to connect with someone or making the change to electronic communication as the primary tool. People seemed to work very well with it all and kept a sense of humor with whatever challenges came up.

Personally, the experience was strengthening for me. My husband and I really simplified and focused on priorities. The lack of being able to smile due to the mask and hug someone that needed it was the hardest. In some ways I miss it."

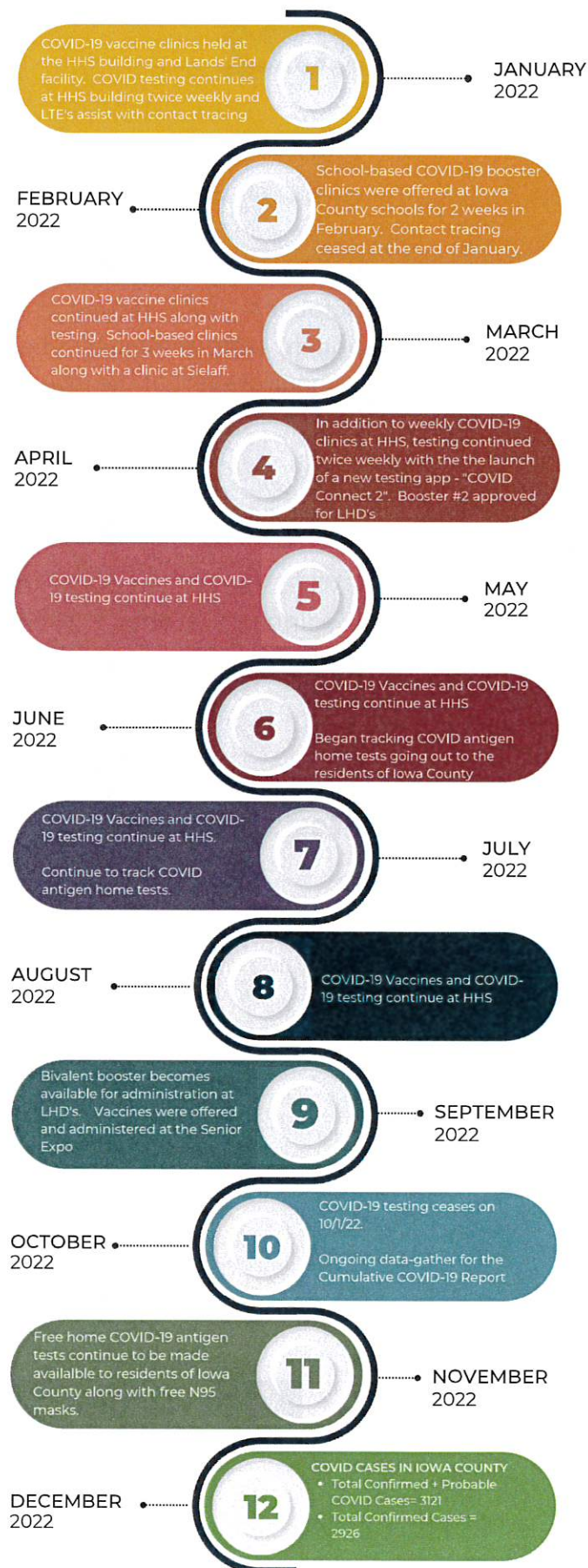
Susan Mahaney
AODA Prevention Specialist
Unified Community Services
Dodgeville, Wisconsin



2022

IOWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

COVID-19 TIMELINE - 2022



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE BY YEAR

2022

Overview

See COVID-19 Timeline - 2022.

Testing

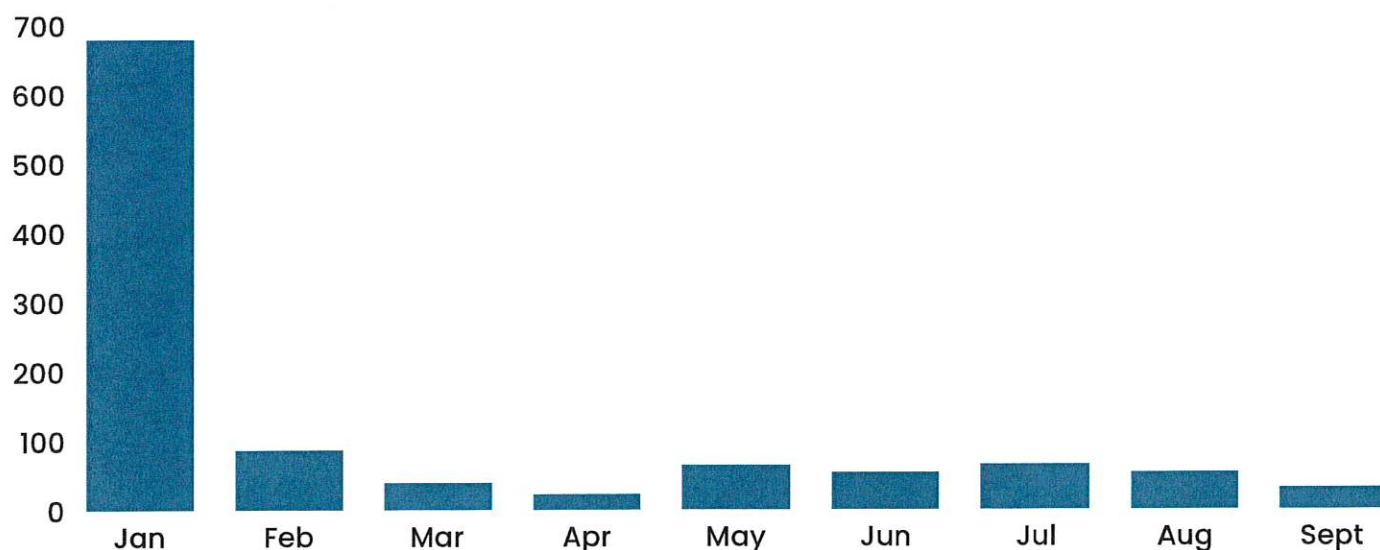
The ICHD continued to offer drive-thru COVID-19 testing in 2022. Testing was offered twice weekly through the month of September. Beginning October 1, 2022, testing at the HHS building ceased, and the promotion and distribution of at-home (antigen) tests continued. The below “COVID-19 Drive-thru Testing” information is provided from the 2022 Annual Report of the Iowa County Health Department.

COVID-19 TESTING

COVID-19 Drive-thru Testing

The ICHD continued to offer drive-thru COVID-19 testing in 2022. Testing was offered twice weekly through the month of September. Beginning October 1, 2022, testing at the HHS building ceased and the promotion and distribution of at-home (antigen) tests continued.

1092 COVID-19 tests processed



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE BY YEAR

2022

Contact Tracing

COVID-19 contact tracing of positive cases continued in January 2022 and was managed by the nurses on staff at the Health Department with the assistance of some of the LTE staff.

In a letter from Ryan Westergaard, MD, PhD, MPH Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases, dated January 21, 2022:

***“Data collection from individual patients through standardized case investigations is no longer expected or required for every Wisconsin resident who tests positive for COVID-19. Case investigations should occur, resource permitting, when necessary to contain outbreaks in high risk settings, to understand new or unusual patterns of disease, or to inform public health interventions.*”**

Contact tracing (e.g. follow-up from the public health departments to all close contacts) is no longer expected or required for every COVID-19 case but rather should be used when deemed appropriate in high-risk settings where preventing or controlling outbreaks is necessary to protect vulnerable people.”

We continued to provide outbreak management and contact tracing support to organizations such as long-term care facilities and daycares. The public was notified of the change in protocol and the Health Department continued to provide information to the residents of Iowa County through Facebook posts and the COVID-19 Dashboard on our website.

Public Information Campaigns

Communication to partners, stakeholders and the public continued as the pandemic necessitated consistent and regular updates throughout 2022. Guidance and recommendations continued to evolve and much of the communications focused on testing and vaccine opportunities. (2022 Annual Report of the Iowa County Health Department).

Data

Data continued to be a critical part of keeping the community and our partners updated on key metrics. The weekly dashboard summary was adapted as the response evolved and key metrics were used to inform the guidance and recommendations. These metrics were consistently communicated to partner, stakeholders, and the public.

Vaccination Efforts

The Health Department staff continued to provide COVID-19 vaccines throughout all of 2022.

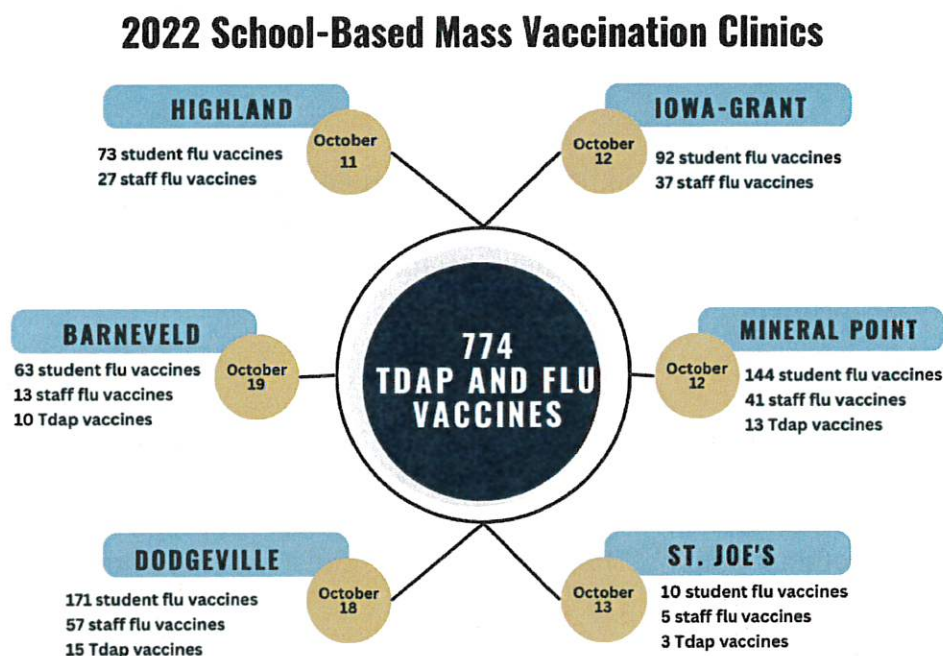
- January- vaccines are offered at both the Lands' End clinic site and HHS building.
- February/March- vaccine clinics are held at the HHS building and in schools.
- February/March of 2022 we provided 123 COVID-19 vaccines to area school children.
- September brought the arrival of the Bivalent booster vaccine.
- October 2022- we provided 733 flu vaccines to students and staff in IC schools.

School-based vaccine clinics

Information taken from 2022 Annual Report of the Iowa County Health Department.

The Iowa County Health Department continues to place a high value on our relationships with schools in our county. We continue to grow and nurture our relationships with school nurses and administrators and serve as an ongoing resource, not only to them, but also the families they serve. In 2022, we continued to have regularly scheduled Zoom meetings with the school nurses. The frequency of those meetings was based on mutual need.

In addition, we collaborated with each school to provide mass vaccination clinics within the school setting both in February of 2022 (COVID-19 boosters) and again in October of 2022 (flu vaccines). In February and March, we provided 123 vaccines to area school children and in October, we provided 733 flu vaccines to the students and staff in Iowa County schools.



Providing Tdap and Flu vaccines to Iowa County Schools

The Response Through the Eyes of a Community Partner

In 2024 we asked a number of our community partners to reflect on the pandemic through the lens of their personal and professional lives.

We asked them to share their experiences, most significant challenges their organization faced, including the most impactful stressors, as well as the resilience they witnessed within their organization and community. Finally, we asked for personal stories that documented the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Here is what they had to say.....

From the perspective of a person working in media

“With the businesses ordered closed we missed the face-to-face contact especially in the sales area. We had to be very creative to maintain our product.

Staff--most employees elected to come into the office to do their work. Only one elected to stay at home but we were able to manage that with little problem. Of course, we instituted a lot of hand washing and overall cleanliness.

Coverage--what was physical attendance at meetings we covered was reduced to Zoom meetings which once we figured out how they would be presented we were able to maintain decent coverage.

Customer service--we had instances where people did not want to enter our building, so we conducted some of our business outside. Not a real problem but an inconvenience.

Event coverage--most events were cancelled, and some events allowed only a limited number to attend.

As noted already it was hard to adjust to how we had to cover the communities and deliver the news. We did a lot more phone and email interviews which takes the personal touch out of the stories. But our staff was diligent and creative, thus getting things done timely for our readers and customers.”

Pat Reilly

Owner/Publisher/Editor

The Dodgeville Chronicle

From the perspective of multi-cultural outreach

“Difficulty meeting with clients - this was challenging.

Used social media, WhatsApp, and other remote strategies. Masked and met when absolutely necessary to help mitigate the challenges.

A recent amputee required ongoing visits to the prosthetic clinic. This required masking and driving. We were able to complete all visits, but with some stress.”

Monica Sella

Bilingual Outreach Specialist

Multicultural Outreach Program

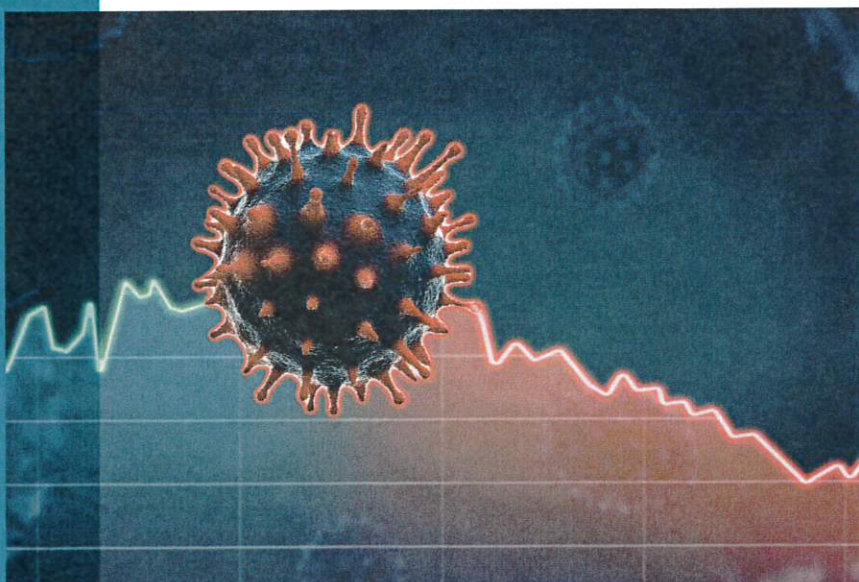
Self-Care Strategies for Resilience

- Start a gratitude journal 
- Prepare your favorite food 
- Make your space comfy and cozy 
- Video chat with your best friends 
- Set boundaries with your media consumption
- Make a playlist of your favorite songs (and share with your friends)

COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery

RESILIENCE

2023



COVID-19 IN 2023

January

END OF THE FEDERAL COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

- Vaccines remain available.
- COVID-19 at-home tests may not be covered by insurance.
- Treatment to prevent severe COVID-19 remain available while supplies last.

August

MONOVALENT VACCINE

September 12, 2023 CDC recommended use of the updated 2023-2024 monovalent vaccine for all individuals ages 6 months or older.

December



ICHD continued to document COVID-19 outbreaks in local long-term care facilities and provided regular updates on infection prevention, vaccines, and best practices.

VACCINES

December 2022- April 2023 CDC made recommendations for a single bivalent vaccine dose for most persons aged ≥ 6 years.

May

QUARANTINE & ISOLATION GUIDELINES UPDATED

September

ANTIGEN TESTS AND N95 MASKS

Throughout all of 2023, the ICHD has provided free at-home antigen COVID tests and free N-95 masks. This offering will cease when the current supply of tests/masks is depleted.

Ongoing...

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE BY YEAR

2023



Overview

2023 finally saw the pandemic shift to endemic status as COVID-19 was officially no longer classified as a Category 1 disease. Other significant changes also occurred, namely the disease surveillance aspects of reporting individual cases as well as the privatization of the COVID-19 vaccine. Our role shifted back to vaccination of the uninsured or underinsured.

Throughout the COVID-19 response, for example, the ICHD worked closely and successfully with local emergency management to coordinate leadership of county response efforts. We continue this important partnership with trainings and ongoing preparedness planning and response to local events such as weather and structure fires.

Testing

Antigen tests and N95 mask distribution continued into 2023. ICHD distributed 4,843 free at-home COVID-19 antigen tests to the public and 869 free N95 masks to the public.

Contact Tracing

ICHD continued to document COVID-19 outbreaks in local long-term care facilities and provided regular updates on infection prevention, vaccines, and best practices.

Public Information Campaigns

The ICHD understands its critical role in providing proactive health education and health prevention messages as well as keeping the community informed about public health information. Information is shared in a timely manner through various avenues including social media, email listservs, press releases, community events, and community partners.

Data

As of November 2023, reporting of COVID-19 cases to public health is no longer required in Wisconsin, unless a confirmed or probable case is associated with a hospitalization or pediatric death.

Vaccination Efforts

ICHD administered 72 COVID-19 vaccines in 2023.

In 2023 the COVID-19 vaccine was commercialized so the ICHD is able to offer the COVID-19 vaccine through the Bridge Access Program for free to adults who are uninsured or underinsured.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY

Service Delivery and Operational Continuity Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, Iowa County Health Department remained committed to ensuring the health and safety of our community. During these challenging times, we adapted our operations to maintain critical services while safeguarding the well-being of our staff, partners, and the public.

Service Delivery

Proactive measures were taken to ensure that essential public health services remained uninterrupted. These include:

- **Testing and Vaccination:** COVID-19 testing and vaccination clinics were designed and implemented to prioritize safety and efficiency.
- **Case Management and Contact Tracing:** responding to and monitoring COVID-19 cases included ensuring timely outreach and support to affected individuals and their close contacts.
- **Community Health Programs:** Our foundational areas of public health including communicable disease control (for diseases other than COVID-19, chronic disease and injury prevention, environmental public health, maternal, child and family health and access to clinical care were managed on a case-by-case basis.

Operational Continuity

To protect our workforce and ensure uninterrupted services, we have implemented the following:

- **Telecommute and Hybrid Models:** Staff were equipped to work remotely to reduce exposure within the office space while maintaining productivity. A schedule was devised that allowed for 50% of the staff to be in the office while 50% worked remotely. This schedule alternated from week-to-week.
- **Enhanced Safety Protocols:** For essential in-person operations, we have implemented strict cleaning, personal protective equipment (PPE) use, and physical distancing measures.
- **Surge Capacity Planning:** Resources and staffing were adjusted to respond to fluctuating pandemic demands including the use of LTE (Limited Term Employment) nurses that served as a robust team of vaccinators as well as serving on a team that worked the drive-thru testing site.
- **Community Support and Engagement:** Throughout the pandemic, the Iowa County Health Department continued to support the community through timely information and resources. Regular updates on service availability, COVID-19 guidelines, and health resources were shared through our website, social media platforms, and community outreach efforts.

LESSONS LEARNED BEST PRACTICES

Lessons Learned and Best Practices gleaned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided valuable insights into the operations and responses of local health departments. These lessons learned and best practices will guide future public health preparedness and response efforts.

Lessons Learned

1. Importance of Preparedness Planning:

- Existing emergency plans and continuity frameworks were crucial but required real-time adjustments to meet unprecedented challenges.
- Gaps in supply chains, especially for PPE and testing kits, highlighted the need for diversified and scalable procurement strategies.

2. Role of Communication:

- Transparent, consistent communication built trust and reduced misinformation.
- Multilingual and culturally tailored messaging was critical to reaching diverse populations effectively.

3. Equity in Public Health:

- The pandemic magnified existing health disparities, emphasizing the need to prioritize underserved communities in testing, vaccination, and outreach efforts.
- Partnerships with community organizations proved invaluable for addressing these disparities.

4. Workforce Resilience:

- Burnout among health professionals underscored the need for ongoing mental health support and flexible work arrangements.
- Cross-training staff allowed for better role adaptability during surges.

5. Technology Integration:

- The rapid adoption of telehealth and digital tools improved accessibility but also highlighted the digital divide in some populations.
- Real-time data collection and analysis were essential for effective decision-making but required robust IT infrastructure.

Best Practices

1. Enhancing Operational Flexibility:

- Maintain a surge-capable workforce with cross-training and just-in-time training for emergencies.
- Develop adaptable response protocols for various scenarios, including pandemics, natural disasters, or other public health crises.

2. Building Community Partnerships:

- Strengthen relationships with community organizations, faith-based groups, and local leaders to enhance trust and collaboration.
- Establish formal agreements for resource sharing during emergencies.

3. Investing in Public Health Infrastructure:

- Prioritize funding for technology upgrades, including data systems and telecommunication tools, to streamline operations and outreach.
- Maintain stockpiles of critical supplies, including PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and identifying reliable vendors for emergency procurement.

4. Advancing Health Equity:

- Ensure public health interventions are inclusive by engaging directly with underserved and marginalized populations.
- Develop targeted outreach campaigns using data to identify and address inequities.

5. Improving Risk Communication:

- Train and maintain a proactive communication team trained in crisis messaging.
- Leverage multiple platforms (social media, traditional media, and community networks) to reach diverse audiences.

6. Promoting Workforce Wellness:

- Establish wellness programs, peer support systems, and flexible scheduling to support staff mental health.
- Foster a culture of recognition and appreciation for public health professionals.

By reflecting on these experiences, local health departments can strengthen their capacity to respond to future public health challenges effectively while ensuring the well-being of their communities and staff.

FUTURE PREPAREDNESS & RESILIENCE

Recommendations for Future Preparedness and Resilience for Local Health Departments

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical need for robust public health systems. Local health departments can enhance their future preparedness and resilience by adopting the following recommendations:

1. Strengthen Public Health Infrastructure:

- Invest in Workforce Development:
 - Expand recruitment and training programs to build a well-prepared and adaptable workforce.
 - Provide ongoing professional development, including cross-training for emergency roles.
 - Prioritize mental health support and wellness initiatives for staff.
- Modernize Data and Technology Systems:
 - Implement interoperable data systems to enable real-time surveillance, reporting, and analytics.
 - Expand access to telehealth and digital health tools to increase service reach.
 - Ensure cybersecurity measures protect sensitive health data.

2. Expand Emergency Preparedness Plans:

- Develop Comprehensive Emergency Plans:
 - Include contingencies for prolonged pandemics, natural disasters, and other crises.
 - Establish protocols for surge staffing, resource allocation, and supply chain disruptions.
 - Create scenario-based drills and exercises to test and refine these plans.
- Enhance Supply Chain Resilience:
 - Maintain stockpiles of critical supplies, including PPE, testing materials, and vaccines.
 - Establish reliable vendor networks and explore regional resource-sharing agreements.

3. Build Stronger Community Partnerships:

- Engage Diverse Stakeholders:
 - Collaborate with schools, businesses, faith-based organizations, and community groups to extend outreach.
 - Foster trust by involving community leaders in planning and response efforts.
- Address Social Determinants of Health:
 - Partner with organizations to address barriers to care, such as transportation, housing, and food insecurity.
 - Incorporate equity considerations into all preparedness activities.

4. Improve Risk Communication Strategies:

- Develop Proactive Communication Plans:
 - Train staff in crisis communication and risk messaging.
 - Establish clear, transparent, and consistent communication channels to combat misinformation.
- Leverage Multiple Outreach Platforms:
 - Use social media, traditional media, and community networks to reach diverse populations.
 - Tailor messaging to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

5.Enhance Community Resilience:

- Promote Health Literacy:
 - Provide ongoing education about infectious diseases, vaccination, and preventive care.
 - Equip community members with the tools to recognize and respond to health emergencies.
- Support Vulnerable Populations:
 - Prioritize resources and outreach for at-risk groups, including the elderly, immunocompromised, and underserved communities.

6.Secure Sustainable Funding:

- Advocate for Long-Term Investments:
 - Work with policymakers to ensure sustained funding for public health infrastructure and emergency preparedness.
 - Explore diverse funding sources, including grants and public-private partnerships.
- Create Flexible Budgeting Models:
 - Allow for reallocation of resources during emergencies without compromising other essential services.

7.Foster Regional and National Collaboration:

- Strengthen Regional Networks:
 - Collaborate with neighboring health departments for coordinated responses to large-scale events.
- Engage with National Initiatives:
 - Align local efforts with state and federal public health programs to leverage additional resources and guidance.

By implementing these recommendations, local health departments can build more resilient systems capable of protecting public health in the face of future crises while maintaining the trust and well-being of their communities.

FROM THE HEALTH OFFICER/DIRECTOR

YEARS 2020, 2021, 2022

The letters that follow are letters from the Iowa County Health Officer/Director, Debbie Siegenthaler. Debbie wrote these letters as part of annual reports in the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. In her letters, Debbie recaps the activities of the Iowa County Health Department through the pandemic. No cumulative report on the pandemic would be complete without the perspective of the leadership of our local health department. We thank Debbie for her persistent and tireless leadership. She consistently navigated the ever-changing guidelines and recommendations of the CDC and Wisconsin DHS without losing sight of the human side of the pandemic which affected both her employees and her constituents.



Staff of Iowa County Health Department in 2022