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**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: Local Media

From: Rock County Public Health Department, Beloit Health System, Edgerton Hospital, Mercyhealth, SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Janesville

Date: December 9, 2021

**Local Hospitals Need Your Help to Decrease Hospitalizations**

**Rock County, WI** – Over the past several weeks, Rock County's hospitals – Beloit Health System, Edgerton Hospital, MercyHealth and SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville – have reported significant increases in Emergency Department visits and hospitalizations.

Fall and winter are typically the busiest time for our Rock County hospitals, as there are many community members who need inpatient care for seasonal illnesses like influenza, chronic conditions, injuries and emergencies. Currently, local hospitals have reported Emergency Department activity that is nearly double what it was this time last year.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for hospitals to transfer patients if needed, as most hospitals throughout the Midwest are full. Now is the time for our community to work together to address the current situation and help our hospitals. Doing so will help ensure that all who need inpatient care are able to receive exceptional service that is close to home.

Last year, the COVID-19 inpatient census peaked at 74, which is an amount no one wants to reach again. There are now 57 community members who are receiving inpatient care due to COVID-19, and many beds are also being occupied by those who no longer have "active" cases of COVID-19 but remain hospitalized and seriously ill. Even though current COVID-19 numbers are lower than the peak last fall, hospitals are reporting that patients are generally coming in with more severe illness and are needing to be hospitalized for longer periods of time.

Our health systems, which are now very near or at capacity on a daily basis, need the community's help. The best way to thank your health care heroes and help your community is to stay as healthy as you can.

Vaccination is the most effective tool to control the spread of COVID-19 and prevent severe illness. Community members who have not received the COVID-19 vaccine are encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Individuals age 18 and older who are fully vaccinated are encouraged to get a booster shot at least six months after completing the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine series or two months after receiving a Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccine is free and there are many vaccination locations and opportunities available. Visit [RockCountyShot.com](https://rockcountysot.com) or [VaccineFinder.org](https://vaccinefinder.org) to find a provider near you. If you need a ride to a COVID-19 vaccine clinic or appointment, call 2-1-1 for assistance.

In addition to the COVID-19 vaccine, everyone also is asked to follow these preventative measures:

- Receive the influenza vaccine
- Wear masks or face coverings in indoor settings that cover both your nose and mouth
- Practice good hand hygiene, using hand sanitizer or soap and water
- Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Choose smaller gatherings
- Stay home when you feel unwell
- Get tested if you have symptoms or have been identified as a close contact to someone who has COVID-19

Whenever possible seek care from your doctor or clinic instead of the Emergency Department. Telehealth options are also widely available. If you are in need of immediate medical attention for a severe or life-threatening situation, please continue to seek care at your local Emergency Department.

Rock County's hospitals would like to remind community members that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. We should all continue to take precautions to minimize the risk of infection and hospitalization. Taking these steps will help protect ourselves and our loved ones. We all play a part in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and improving our current situation.

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