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Here are 10 questions you should ask when choosing a day-care provider.

In today's paper

STATE: Illinois lawmakers OK kindergarten reform, literacy plan. 5A



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Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, speaks in favor of a bill on the House floor Thursday that would allow multi-occupancy all-gender bathrooms in Illinois.

Top allergen culprits in the metro-east

BY MEREDITH HOWARD
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The beginning of spring usually brings about warmer weather, rain and potentially irritating pollen. Those who often experience allergy symptoms may want to be aware of the types of trees that can cause issues.

Allergens are expected to be about average this year in St. Louis, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America's 2023 Allergy Capitals list.

The city received a score of 70.04 on a 100-point scale, with 100 representing the worst allergens. The average score was 71.49.

What are some of the most common allergens in the metro area, and what will pollen levels be like in the coming days? Here's what to know.

COMMON ALLERGENS THE IN ST. LOUIS AREA

Those who are often affected by tree pollen may want to avoid oak, cedar, hickory, walnut and ash trees in the spring, as St. Louis Family Allergy reports they're some of the most common allergen "culprits" locally.

Grass pollen can also be an issue, and the St. Louis Family Allergy website says symptoms may include:

- Asthma symptoms
- Itchy, stinging or watery eyes
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Congestion
- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- A runny nose or nasal congestion

SEE ALLERGEN, 5A

Bill allowing all-gender bathrooms passes Illinois House

BY PETER HANCOCK
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SPRINGFIELD

The Illinois House narrowly passed a bill Thursday that would allow businesses, universities and other building owners to designate multi-occupancy all-gender bathrooms if they choose to do so.

The bill passed on a vote of 60-40, the bare minimum number of "yes" votes needed for passage in the 118-member House, after the presiding officer held the roll open for several

seconds waiting for the 60th vote to be recorded.

State Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, who sponsored the bill, said the language of House Bill 1286 is identical to an earlier bill that passed 63-43 in the House in 2021 but was never taken up in the Senate.

Illinois law already allows for single-occupancy bathrooms to be designated for all genders, but Stuart's bill would allow an all-gender designation for bathrooms that accommodate two or more people.

The bill sets out standards that all-gender bathrooms

would have to meet, such as "inclusive signage" that does not indicate any specific gender; stall dividers with functioning locks controlled by the user; and partitions for each urinal, if urinals are present.

In addition, if such bathrooms are part of a newly constructed building or a building undergoing major renovation, they would have to comply with requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and the Illinois Accessibility Code. Each toilet stall would have to include a small trash receptacle, and it would have to

have at least one vending machine for menstruation supplies and one baby diaper changing station.

The bill also provides that any multi-occupancy restroom could be converted to an all-gender restroom. But if another single-gender multi-occupancy restroom is located adjacent to or near the all-gender restroom, both would have to be designated as all-gender facilities.

The bill passed out of the House Human Services Committee on Feb. 22 on a 6-3 vote

SEE BILL, 5A

CDC reports 12 areas are at medium COVID-19 community level

BY MEREDITH HOWARD
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The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention rated one southwestern Illinois county at a medium COVID-19 community level in the Thursday update, along with 11 other counties across the state.

Calhoun, White, Edgar, Vermilion, Livingston, Stark, Lee, Ogle, Boone, Winnebago, Stephenson and Jo Daviess counties were at a medium level, and no counties were at a high level, compared to one high level county last week. St. Louis City and St. Louis County were also at medium levels.

The CDC's COVID-19 community levels are updated Thursdays and based on metrics from the past seven days, including new hospital admissions per 100,000 people, average percent of staffed, inpatient beds occupied by COVID patients and new cases per 100,000 people.

People in high community level areas are advised to wear a mask indoors and on public transportation, and the federal

agency says people at a higher risk of severe illness should consider precautions in medium-level areas.

The Illinois Department of Public Health reported 8,560 new confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases and 39 deaths for the week ending March 19.

FDA EXPANDS VACCINE ELIGIBILITY

IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra said in a March 24 statement the department welcomes the Food and Drug Administration's March 14 decision to expand the use of Pfizer bivalent booster shots to children ages 6 months to 4 years at least 2 months after their primary series.

"I am pleased that the FDA has authorized and the CDC has expanded its recommendation to allow this category of young children to receive a booster dose of Pfizer's updated COVID-19 vaccine," Vohra said in the statement. "This recommendation now means that all children in this age group are eligible to receive an updated vac-

SEE COVID-19 DATA, 3A



DERIK HOLTSMANN dholtmann@bnd.com

Chamber of commerce members, Cahokia Heights officials, and family help Germany Allen, owner of a new Airbnb located in Cahokia Heights, officially open the location.

COMMENTARY

St. Clair County Airbnb offers quick access to downtown St. Louis

BY JENNIFER GREEN
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A few years back, the husband and I attended a beer festival in Murphysboro.

Not wanting to drive back home afterward, we planned ahead and booked a night at an Airbnb near the event.

We spent the night there with our host, Stephen King.

No, not *that* Stephen King. This Stephen King was a cat.

And he was a most gracious host.

He was good company and even showed us around his cat space at the front of the house.

His human, the owner of the house and a volunteer firefighter, stayed at the stationhouse, so we never saw him.

The experience was a really good one. And the Airbnb was *much* better than a regular hotel. We had absolute privacy like we do at home.

Mostly. But to be fair, Stephen King's presence wasn't intrusive. Even if he did stick his paws under the door first thing in the morning to coax us out to hang with him.

Totally cute, but still. Anyway, my point is that it's not always easy to find that full privacy in a comfortable setting and convenient location.

A new place in Cahokia Heights, My Travelers Home Airbnb, provides all of this.

A NICE PLACE TO STAY

Mother and daughter duo Germany Allen and Angel Ford decided to open an Airbnb after observing the increasing popularity in short-term rentals.

Ford said when she was away at school, she saw the need for a place to stay on occasion.

She saw a need for a place conveniently close to St. Louis.

In June, Allen and Ford bought a 950-square-foot

SEE GREEN, 5A



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