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Joint News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Berrien County announces first death due to COVID-19

(Berrien County, Michigan) – The Berrien County Health Department is reporting its first death of a resident from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The person who died was a male over the age of 70 who was hospitalized at Lakeland Medical Center in St. Joseph. He did have serious underlying health conditions. The county currently has 32 positive cases of COVID-19, including this reported death. Many of these individuals are recovering from their symptoms at home, and at this time, 10 of those positive cases are known to have fully recovered from their symptoms.

“On behalf of the entire Spectrum Health Lakeland team our deepest sympathies go out to the family and friends of this individual,” said Loren B. Hamel, MD, president, Spectrum Health Lakeland. “We realize this is difficult news for our community and these are unprecedented and uncertain times for all. We have the deepest compassion for our friends and neighbors who fall sick, and for our team members who remain committed to care for our COVID-19 patients and fight this virus together.”

“This is a tragic loss of life and we share our heartfelt condolences with the family,” said Nicki Britten, health officer of the Berrien County Health Department. Britten urges the continuation of social distancing under the “Stay Home, Stay Safe” Executive Order. “Protecting the health of our community and slowing the spread of COVID-19 is our top priority.”

Berrien County Health Department and other partners have been planning for months for addressing COVID-19 in the community. Spectrum Health Lakeland continues to expand its operations to address the needs of patients, as case counts rise and additional medical needs arise. Berrien County officials have taken several steps to help fight the spread of COVID-19 including:

Prevention: Residents are encouraged to continue prevention efforts. Wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing, avoid touching your face and avoid large gatherings. Social distancing of at least six feet is urged.

Free virtual screenings: Spectrum Health offers free virtual screenings for COVID-19 to those in Michigan who have symptoms and may be concerned they have the virus. Callers to the screening line (616.391.2380) will be asked a series of questions about their condition by a provider who will advise whether they need to seek additional care.

Testing and Specimen Collection: Lakeland opened a drive-up COVID-19 specimen collection site at the Center for Outpatient Services, St. Joseph to enable fast, efficient and safe testing from individuals who have a physician's order. Spectrum Health is also processing all COVID-19 tests at its lab in Grand Rapids resulting in faster turnaround time for test results.

Community Information and Resources: Berrien County residents with questions related to COVID-19 are encouraged to call 1-800-815-5485, the Berrien County COVID-19 Response Hotline. Berrien County Health Department and Spectrum Health Lakeland have downloadable materials, videos and other resources online to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Community members, churches, schools, businesses and others are encouraged to visit www.bchdmi.org/COVID19 or www.spectrumhealth.org/covid19 to access the resources.

Clarification on “Stay Home, Stay Safe” Executive Order: Berrien County residents are urged not to call Public Safety Dispatch with non-emergency questions or concerns regarding interpretation of or compliance with Executive Orders. Residents are asked to call the Berrien County COVID-19 Response Hotline at (800) 815-5485 instead. There is now an online tip form to assist those wanting to report a violation of the Executive Order. Although it is law enforcement’s hope that individuals will voluntary comply with these orders, law enforcement will take the appropriate action if the situation is one that appears to have a clear public health consequence. The tip form can be found at www.bcsheriff.org/ExecutiveOrderTip.

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