



Joint News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Berrien County Health Officials Note COVID-19 Cases Trending Upward

Residents urged to continue taking precautions to prevent viral transmission

(Berrien County, Michigan) – Officials from the Berrien County Health Department and Spectrum Health Lakeland are noting accelerating trends of increased COVID-19 activity over the past several weeks. Since the beginning of July, Berrien County has seen an increase in new cases as well as an increase in the percent of COVID-19 test results that are positive, indicating that the recent uptick in cases likely represents an increase of viral activity, rather than increases in testing. Hospitalizations and deaths have not had similar increases to date.

Much of the recent growth in new cases is amongst a younger demographic, specifically those under 40 years old, as compared to in the beginning of the pandemic when cases skewed towards the older adult population. Even as the county has seen an overall increase in recent cases, current hospitalization levels remain below surge capacity. There was a four week period without any deaths, and there have been three deaths within the last two weeks; the individuals who have passed recently were older adults with multiple comorbidities, consistent with trends previously noted for those at highest risk of death. The lower levels of hospitalizations and few deaths can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the younger people comprising many of the new COVID-19 diagnoses are at much lower risk for severe illness and death, though they are still capable of spreading the virus to others, especially those who are at higher risk.

Since the July 4th holiday, Berrien County has seen clusters of COVID-19 illness linked back to large gatherings, family parties and celebrations, church events, and other high risk activity where lack of social distancing and face coverings likely contributed to the quick spread of the virus through those in attendance. “These trends are certainly something to pay attention to and demonstrate the impact of our collective actions. We all understand the economic and social benefits of having the economy more open, and it is critical that we all take actions that allow things to remain open without leading to surges in COVID-19 transmission” said Berrien County Health Officer, Nicki Britten. “Bearing in mind the start of

the new school year is rapidly approaching, we need to make a conscious shift in the way we live our lives to avoid reaching transmission levels that would prohibit in-person instruction for students. That means staying at home as much as possible, especially if you're feeling sick, reducing how many people we see in person, continuing to wear face coverings and keep physical distance in public."

"Recently we've seen our highest rates in quite some time of both the number of COVID-19 positive patients presenting to the emergency department and the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to the hospital," said Robert Nolan, DO, medical director of emergency medicine, Spectrum Health Lakeland. "While we aren't taxing our hospital capacity yet, it could happen if people aren't diligent about social distancing and wearing a mask. These measures are such a small thing to do in consideration of our community, and, if we choose not to follow them, can have profound life ending consequences for some. Wearing a mask isn't necessarily for you, it's for your neighbors and community."

Berrien County health experts agree that everyone must continue to do their part to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in order to reach the goal of keeping our community safe, healthy, and open. It is vital that all residents, as well as visitors to the area, keep a six foot distance from others around them, wear a face covering when in enclosed public places and when outdoors if a six foot distance from others cannot be maintained, continue with good hand hygiene practices, and stay home if feeling sick. For more information on the coronavirus pandemic response in Berrien County, visit www.bchdmi.org/COVID19 or www.spectrumhealthlakeland.org/COVID-19.

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