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Widespread community transmission prompts prioritization for COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing

Rising case counts across Grand Traverse County and the state of Michigan indicate widespread community transmission of COVID-19, necessitating a change in strategy regarding containment of the virus. Case investigators at the Grand Traverse County Health Department will prioritize outreach to high-risk cases and settings going forward.

“Over the past month, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of new daily cases in our region and county. When community transmission becomes so widespread, our strategies need to pivot to have the most impact. This approach involves quickly identifying and investigating high-priority cases such as those who potentially increase the risk for further spread.” said Grand Traverse County Health Officer, Wendy Hirschenberger. “Our focus will now be on minimizing the spread and severity of the virus in high-risk cases and situations. [With basic information that we have been and will continue to provide](#), most people who test positive can implement their own isolation and notify close contacts themselves.”

Priority cases and situations include: acute and outpatient healthcare workers, people under age 22 years; anyone linked to a school (includes childcare facilities, K-12 schools, and colleges); people over age 65 years; anyone linked to an acute care, skilled nursing or long-term care facility; and any time a death has occurred. The health department will also take the recency of the case into account. Since November 1, we are seeing an average of over 27 new cases per day, taxing the capacity of the health department’s disease investigation team to contact all cases and close contacts. Additionally, referrals of positive lab reports are lagging from many reporting entities.

Since November 1, the cumulative case count has risen by 500. Average daily case counts have quadrupled from the beginning of October and the percent of people who test positive for COVID-19 has roughly tripled over the last month, growing from approximately 3.4% to 10% as of November 16.

“Despite utilizing the state’s contact tracing team and pulling from other sectors of the health department, we cannot keep up with the rise in cases,” added Hirschenberger. “We need the community’s help with the surge we are currently experiencing in order to help control it. Even working at full capacity, seven days a week, health department staff are unable to investigate all positive cases and notify close contacts quickly.”

The Health Department is asking for anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 to:

1. Immediately self-isolate, avoiding contact with others for at least ten days since symptoms began (or since they took the test if there are no symptoms). They must additionally see an improvement in symptoms and be fever-free without use of medications for 24 hours before ending isolation.
2. Notify their close contacts. Close contacts are people who were within 6 feet of the COVID-19 positive person for a total of 15 minutes or more two days before the person developed

(2. continued)

symptoms (or two days prior to that person *taking* the test if there are no symptoms). Close contacts must quarantine for the full 14 days regardless of symptoms or their test results.

3. Please follow all instructions in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

Additional information can be found on our website at:

http://gtchd.org/DocumentCenter/View/15620/When-can-I-be-around-others-again_?bidId=

<http://gtchd.org/DocumentCenter/View/15594/iF-you-test-positive-for-COVID-19-5?bidId=>

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