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Promoting an Optimal State of Wellness in Lake County

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coronavirus Update: Masking Strongly Encouraged When in Public, Industries Stepping Up for Safety

Gary Pace, MD, MPH
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Lake County, CA (April 13, 2020) – We now have five confirmed coronavirus cases in Lake County, with the latest positive test results coming in Friday and over the weekend. To date, all locally detected cases have been rooted in initial contact with a known out-of-county case, with secondary infections only confirmed within households with a known positive case. All five that have tested positive are currently doing well, and cooperating with home isolation.

The predicted rise of cases and severe illness in our area has not materialized due to the significant effort that the community has made to “shelter in place.” Cases that have popped up do not appear to have spread within the county, thanks to people’s decreased mobility, use of masks, and care with handwashing. Limiting out-of-county travel has also slowed entry of the virus into our area.

The low numbers at this point indicate we may be able to avoid the severe crush of illness that has unfolded in some urban areas like New York, New Orleans, and Detroit. A month ago, the momentum for such a surge seemed to be building in our neighboring counties to the south, but local and state efforts to stop the spread clearly have been successful.

Decision-making to end preventive measures currently in place is highly complex. Relaxing restrictions too quickly would likely bring on a severe surge, according to experts. Yet, waiting too long to reintroduce activities will cause even greater financial, educational, and social hardship.

Before we are able to relax some of the general restrictions, we need monitor a bit longer, to ensure no overwhelming surge will occur, put more protections in place for the most vulnerable community members, and develop a clear plan, in conjunction with neighboring counties.

Some of the most devastating effects of the coronavirus outbreak have been seen during rapid spread through nursing facilities. We need to take all possible steps to prevent this from occurring here. Good infection control, having isolation and testing capabilities at each nursing facility, and wearing face coverings are all useful strategies. All are being actively pursued.

Since masking is one way to limit spread in settings where vulnerable individuals are present, I am increasing the strength of the recommendations for face coverings. At this point, there is no intention to mandate face coverings for the general public, but I strongly encourage their use anytime someone goes out of the house.

Because industry-specific guidance has been effective in fostering widespread adoption of masking in areas of greatest concern, no Public Health Orders mandating face coverings are being issued at this time. However, in consistency with existing guidance, moving forward:

- Healthcare workers in hospitals, clinics, and nursing facilities need to wear cloth face coverings when at work. All of the health care partners in our community have willingly adopted these policies already.
- Workers in congregate-living facilities, like assisted living or memory care sites, also need to wear cloth face coverings when at work.
- First responders have been provided very strong guidance on the use of PPE, and are encouraged to continue following these established practices.
- Workers in grocery stores and pharmacies are likewise strongly encouraged to follow recent FDA guidance to wear facial coverings when at work.

As previously noted, N95 and surgical masks are in short supply, and should be reserved for use by healthcare professionals at this time. The CDC additionally cautions, “Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.”

Guidance and options for making your own cloth masks are provided here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Please also continue all other recommended precautions, including:

- Follow Shelter-In-Place and other Public Health Orders;
- Stop all non-essential activities; and
- Practice good hygiene and routine cleaning.

With now five confirmed cases in Lake County, the public should consider every public place as a place that one could be exposed.

We will release information and updates at regular intervals, but will not send out a press release with each new case. Daily numerical updates can be found on the dashboard on the Lake County Health Department website.

Periodic Facebook videos and press releases will be available to update the public on the coronavirus situation, and I will be presenting to the Board of Supervisors every Tuesday at 9:10am.

For Lake County-specific Coronavirus information, please continue to visit the Lake County Health Services Department’s website: <http://health.co.lake.ca.us>

If you still have questions, send an email request to MHOAC@lakecountyca.gov. You can also call during business hours: 707-263-8174.

Thank you for respecting and protecting your neighbors. Stay Informed. Stay Strong. **Stay home.**

Gary Pace MD, MPH