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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Recent Del Norte County COVID-19 Cases,

Del Norte Residents;

As many have heard, we had a significant jump in COVID 19 case counts over this last weekend. There may be a connection with our fourth case for at least some of them. They are all relatively mild cases and are recovering at home. The health department worked all weekend on case investigation and tracing of contacts and we are still pursuing leads and getting information. Most of the new numbers of cases are a result of investigation and getting additional close contacts tested.

This change seems to us to finally feel like this virus has arrived in a way that gets attention. We also are quite certain that this will be the new normal, especially with changes in movement of people and relaxation of restrictions. I want to emphasize that this burst of cases is not related to the relaxation of stay at home orders on Friday, but is more likely because of movement across borders and a little bit of people losing focus on social distancing. We have been hearing more and more reports of people not wearing masks in stores, and have seen more vehicle traffic than a month ago. It seems that people have relaxed their guard a little bit over this last month. And we get that.

We all get cabin fever after a long, rainy winter in a normal year, and it is much worse in 2020. But, we also know that the measures that we have been asking people to do are more important now than ever before. Social distancing, wearing masks, and good hand hygiene are all still critical to getting through the pandemic safely. We are asking everyone who might be a little skeptical to look at our numbers now. And we are asking everyone to be ready for more cases to come.

We are also asking everyone to have masks or face coverings with them all the time. There was a new order signed by myself and posted last Friday that details and clarifies some of the measures in the reopening plan, but mostly it states that people must wear masks or face coverings indoors in public places and in businesses with face-to-face contact. It is not mandatory in children, and no child under 2 should try and wear a face covering, but for older children and teens it is a good idea to wear masks just like adults.

I also want to prepare you for the new element about this outbreak that most of you have not yet experienced. Part of the new strategy of moving through the outbreak is to do what I mentioned the department did this weekend - aggressive contact tracing. What this means is that when we discover a new case, we interview that person as soon as possible and try to find everyone that they may have had contact with, in a way that could have allowed for the virus to move on to a different person; a

“contact” of a positive case. As we have mentioned before, we consider a close personal contact for more than ten minutes to be significant (close meaning literally closer than 6 feet away). What we want to do is to prepare everybody for the process should they end up having a test that is positive for coronavirus. We want you to understand what it is that we would be calling you about, and what type of information we would want to know. If everyone knows about this and does a little preparation along these lines in advance, it makes the job of contact tracing go much quicker and much easier.

So, if you are tested and are waiting for a result, we want you to jot down a list of everyone that you can think of that you might have been “in contact “ with, going back to at least 2 days before you think that you started having any symptoms of COVID-19. The reason for going back that far is because it appears that most people can start spreading the virus for 2-3 days before they start to feel sick. Jot down their names, phone numbers (if you have them), the day that you had contact, and describe the contact (for example: helping someone change a tire, helping look after a friend’s child for an hour while they went to a doctor’s appointment, or anything that seems to fit). Remember, close contact is defined as less than 6 feet away for at least 10 minutes. Be ready to give the information to a caller from the health department or from the clinic where you received care as they may initiate contact tracing on our behalf. Doing all of this in advance helps us save time to reach out to those persons and let them know what they need to do to monitor themselves and protect themselves and their families. We have prepared a document for local clinics to use if they are testing you in the office, and we are hoping to have it ready to distribute this week. When that is done we will place a copy on our website, so everyone else can reference it when they need to.

And also, as a reminder, if you are being tested for COVID, have a positive test, are on quarantine for a suspicion of COVID, or just recovering from COVID, you must let the 911 dispatch person know that information if you have to call for an emergency for anyone in your household. This is a vital courtesy for our first responders, who need to be able to prepare to protect themselves when they transport someone who has the disease.

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