MEDIA RELEASE

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Overwhelmed with Surge in Cases, Public Health is Unable to Reach Close Contacts, Asks for Community's Help to Stop the Spread

Due to the surge in recent COVID-19 cases, Pierce County Public Health is asking for people who test positive to help with their own contact tracing. Local health departments throughout the state of Wisconsin are overwhelmed by the number of positive cases and have to make gut-wrenching decisions about which disease prevention activities to continue. AZ Snyder, Health Officer/Public Health Director states, "Despite preparing for an increase in cases by hiring and training additional contact tracing staff, we do not have the capacity to handle the large surge of cases we are currently seeing. We are still contacting people who test positive, but we need their help in notifying their contacts and telling them to quarantine."

In the past month Pierce County went from receiving 40 to 156 new cases in a week. This aligns with statewide trends. The state surpassed 200,000 cases in late October. It took Wisconsin nearly 8 months to get to 100,000 cases. It took 36 days to get to 200,000 cases. From Oct 7th to October 20th, there was a 52% increase of COVID-19 patients in hospitals in the Western region.

"We are pleading with people to take this seriously. When levels of disease are this high in the community, we can't keep COVID-19 out of facilities like ours, no matter how careful we are," said Kevin Larson, Administrator of Spring Valley Senior Living and Health Care.

If you were exposed to COVID-19, it is possible you will not be notified by public health due to high numbers of cases. To help protect the people around you, please use the following guidance if you are a **positive COVID-19 case**, a **close contact of a positive case**, or are an **employer within the community**:

People who test positive need to:

- [Stay home](#) for 10 days past symptom onset. If, at day 10, you still have a fever or other symptoms haven't improved, stay home until symptoms improve.
- [Contact your close contacts](#). You were infectious starting 2 days before your symptoms developed (or 2 days before your test was collected if you don't have symptoms). Call or text everyone who you had close contact with and tell them to quarantine for 14 days and consider getting a test. Consider using a free, confidential text/email [service](#) to contact your contacts.
- If you went to work while infectious, call your employer and tell them to identify and exclude all close contacts.

- Make sure your household members stay home. Household members who cannot completely separate from the positive case must stay home for 14 days *after the case recovers and leaves isolation.*

People who are close contacts need to self-quarantine and self-monitor to protect themselves and the community. A "close contact" is anyone who was within 6 feet of a positive case for more than 15 minutes or had direct physical contact (hugging, shaking hands). Close contacts need to:

- Quarantine for 14 days past the date of last contact with the positive case. If they live in a household with someone who's positive and couldn't completely separate, they need to stay home for 14 days after the case recovers (usually 10 days after symptom onset).
- Get tested if they develop symptoms. **If a close contact tests negative during their quarantine period, they still need to complete the full 14-day quarantine**. That is because testing while the virus may be in the body but not replicating at detectable levels yet may result in a false negative test.

Employers of COVID-19 positive cases need to:

- Your local health department may not reach out to notify you or assist you with contact tracing.
- A supervisor must identify and quarantine all close contacts of an identified staff person who tests positive for COVID-19. Close contacts are those that were within 6 ft for more than 15 minutes **cumulative** during a 24-hour period while the case was infectious (24 hours before symptoms developed).
- Ensure close contacts complete their 14-day quarantine. **If a close contact tests negative during their quarantine period, they still need to complete the full 14-day quarantine**. That is because testing while the virus may be in the body but not replicating at detectable levels yet may result in a false negative test.

The Pierce County Public Health department will continue to reach out to positive cases to provide education and support and will prioritize contacting any identified close contacts who are linked to schools and other congregate settings such as long-term care facilities. At this time, the public health department strongly encourages the community to cancel all non-essential gatherings and high-risk activities.

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