



GEAUGA PUBLIC HEALTHSM

Promoting and Protecting Community Health

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Press Release

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**Geauga County Health Commissioner calls on public to limit activities
as much as possible due to very high exposure and spread of COVID-19**

Geauga County, OH 11/20/2020 –

Geauga Public Health Commissioner, Tom Quade, says the recent exponential growth of COVID-19 cases in the past 14 days is cause for substantial changes.

Geauga County remains in the second highest risk level of the Public Health Advisory System. For the first time since the implementation of the system, one county, Franklin, has moved to the highest risk level resulting in guidance to only leave home for necessary supplies. Lake County is poised to potentially hit that level next week. Commissioner Quade said that three of the advisory system metrics are quite sobering. "Our own daily increase of new cases has skyrocketed over the last two weeks. Our cases are literally coming in at a rate that is tenfold from what they were and that trend is continuing." That increase in new cases has overwhelmed local health departments across the state to the point where none of them can keep up with the contact tracing process with the timeliness that is required for it to be meaningful. "At this point, we focus on outbreaks and vulnerable populations but we are counting on school administrators and employers to do much of that contact identification in their environments and we respond to incoming questions in a consultative role." The other two metrics that are of great concern in Geauga County are the increase in outpatient visits and hospital admissions. Quade points out that our healthcare resources are regional, not county specific. "Even if we weren't seeing the increases that we are in Geauga County, increased utilization of our regional hospitals will limit the availability of beds as well as the healthcare providers who provide the care." A challenged healthcare system will have a negative impact on health conditions other than COVID-19. This was seen earlier in the pandemic with delayed health seeking behavior, screenings, and treatment.

Health Commissioner Quade is recommending that all employers exercise remote work plans where possible to limit outbreaks within their workplace. Geauga Public Health will begin implementing its own remote work environment plans as a result of the recent increase in cases. No businesses are being asked to close but they are all being asked to be diligent in the use of masks on both employees and patrons.

Health Commissioner Quade says, "I am hopeful that the politicization of disease prevention can be put on hold at least temporarily so the community as a whole can be encouraged to work in unison to save lives. The science is clear. Mask use and distancing reduce viral transmission and will ultimately save lives. When you wear a mask and when your business requires employees and patrons to wear masks, the message you are sending is that you care about others. It is as simple as that."

The exponential growth of COVID-19 cases in the community will ultimately impact the ability of schools to operate in a manner that serves the needs of their students and employees alike. Health Commissioner Quade has been meeting with the school superintendents multiple times each week to inform and support their planning. "I cannot say enough positive things about how seriously they have taken this health threat and the degree of planning they have done to keep the children in the classrooms. This is clearly a priority." The conversations have been focused on strategies to keep children in the classroom but there has always been a recognition that we could get to the point where transitioning to an all-remote learning environment for a period of time might become unavoidable. "Frankly it is now going to depend on the willingness of the public at large to do what is necessary to reverse the current trend of increasing cases. If we continue down the path we are on, a transition to remote learning may become unavoidable." In addition to calling on the public to step up to keep the children in the classroom, Health Commissioner Quade is asking that there be strong consideration of what more the schools can do to control potential spread. "I think it is time to strongly consider postponement of extra-curricular activities that draw together groups of children especially from other schools." Avoiding mixing groups of people, also known as cohorting, is a basic strategy in limiting outbreaks. Quade acknowledges that there will be pressure against any changes. "There will be blowback no matter what decisions get made that introduce change. This is the world we experience. As leaders, we cannot be dictated to be the loudest voices of our detractors. Sometimes we need to listen to the quiet voice of reason and find peace in the fact that, in spite of the blowback, we are acting in what we genuinely believe is in the best interest of those to whom we have dedicated our lives' work."
