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MEDIA RELEASE

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Weekly COVID Update

Unfortunately, this week started with 6 positive cases of COVID-19 in Kit Carson County. All 6 of the cases live in Burlington and are currently in isolation for 14 days. Contact tracing has been conducted and all known contacts have been notified and tested with no additional positive results as of this writing. Two cases were exposed in Texas and a household member then became infected. The other three cases are one family with unknown exposure history. Because it can't be pinpointed where the family was exposed, it is considered to be a local community acquired infection. Please be aware that there is a possibility that an infected person who tested positive may have shopped at the Safeway store in Burlington while ill. If you shopped at Safeway between July 17th and July 19th without wearing a mask or using hand sanitizer after shopping, it is advised to self-monitor for signs of COVID-19 infection which includes a fever greater than 100 degrees, change in the ability to taste food, loss of smell, chills, muscle aches, runny nose, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, headache, abdominal pain, diarrhea. Signs and symptoms usually develop within 3 to 7 days of exposure and most people only exhibit one or a few symptoms or none at all. Most commonly, cold-like symptoms, feeling listless and diarrhea. If you believe you may be infected, quarantine yourself at home and call your healthcare provider or the health department at 719-346-7158 for advice on what to do.

Indoor Mask Order Details

The Kit Carson County Department of Public Health and Environment is tasked with being the monitoring and regulatory agency for health and environmental areas such as communicable disease prevention, food safety, septic, water and air quality. The local environmental health department primarily regulates food safety which includes restaurant inspection. Water and air quality is handled by the Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment with local public health assistance when requested. Consumer Protection is a mandate for the public health office and restaurant licensees are monitored and inspected by the environmental health specialist for compliance with State rules and regulations. There has been, from time to time, the need to close a restaurant because they were not following their license rules, and were found to be placing the public's health at risk. This has been true for decades, but most citizens are unaware of this function of the local health department. The purpose

behind the rules and regulations is to prevent the spread of disease and to protect the community. The statewide Indoor Mask Order has been written into the restaurant license requirements and that is why restaurants cannot “opt out” of this order because the consequences could be revocation of their license and fines levied by the State. This is also true for others who hold a regulatory license such as retail, liquor, cosmetology, dental, or chiropractic among others.

It is the Health Department’s job to ensure the public’s safety regarding communicable disease. Colorado Revised Statute Title 25 provides the legal authority to the local public health office regarding disease control. Revised Statute 25-1.5-102 regarding epidemic and communicable disease gives the power to the local health department to control epidemic and communicable disease. This legal authority is **not** a duty of local law enforcement. Law enforcement’s role is to mitigate or respond to criminal actions according to their codes and statutes and to “keep the peace” as stated by the Sheriff in an earlier social media statement. The Governor did not give counties the option to “opt out” of the Indoor Mask Order issued on July 17th. Since this is a public health order, the local public health agency is bound to enforce the order even if there is opposition or disagreement with it. It is not the health department’s desire to enforce this order without considering the local disease prevalence or threat that exists as compared to a metro or other community. Enforcement is a strong word that is being taken into context when applied in our rural/frontier setting. Public health must react and investigate consumer complaints that are justified regarding the public health indoor mask order. With this in mind, those who choose to follow the public health order, (including our businesses and schools who are required to do so), should not be intimidated, harassed or treated poorly because they are complying with the rules and regulations that their directives, license and/or corporate office requires. The same is true for citizens who choose to comply with the law by wearing a mask while indoors shopping at a retail store, or receiving services from a variety of service providers in the community. We all need to be respectful regarding people’s choices and rights regarding their decision to wear a mask or not. However, when entering a business or indoor space that requires a mask, please do so. The Kit Carson County Department of Public Health and Environment asks that you help them with the control of COVID-19 in our county by observing the “Five Commitments to Containment”. These commitments will help our county maintain its variances that give us the ability to work, worship, and go to school with the least restrictions possible. Should the county experience an outbreak of 10 or more cases in a single week, there is a possibility that we could lose our variances and a mitigation plan will have to be put into place.

Five Commitments to Containment:

1. Maintain 6 feet of distance from anyone not in your household.
2. Wash your hands often.
3. Wear a mask in public – or when you can’t maintain 6 feet apart from others.
4. Stay home when sick.
5. Seek testing immediately and self-report if you experience symptoms.

Kit Carson County COVID School Collaborative Meeting Highlights

The health department, Board of Health and all five school superintendents and school nurses, as well as Morgan Community College have formed a Kit Carson County COVID-19 School Collaborative that provides a forum for all school districts in the County to stay informed regarding the way they are all preparing to re-open school in August and remain open throughout the school year. The Collaborative will meet from time to time to compare notes regarding how things are going throughout the school year and to receive advice and information from one another. The Collaborative will also provide valuable situational awareness to the health department as we all step into uncharted territory....opening school to in-person learning during a pandemic. School districts across the County have been tasked by the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Public Health to design plans to re-open during the COVID pandemic. These plans are written in a manner that takes into consideration the need for students to receive an education while maintaining a safe, disease-free environment to do so. A common thread in all of the planning includes a three phase approach (Green, Yellow, Red) to determine when the school should relax or increase restrictions to prevent the spread of disease to the staff and student population. These may vary somewhat from school district to school district. This example is from the Arriba-Flagler School District plan:

Green status would mean the school is operating as close to normal as possible, with low risk of COVID in the school building. Student instruction would be direct in-person with some modifications. Student interaction would be as normal as possible with assigned seating in classrooms and staying within groups as normal. Student precautions will include parents screening students for health concerns including temperature checks and signs or symptoms of COVID. All students will be required to wash hands on a scheduled basis. Students who present with health concerns at school will be placed in a treatment area and parents will be notified. Do not send sick students to school. The schedule structure would be normal with access to the building closely controlled. Students report to assigned classroom. Playground, lunch, library and gym will be accessed by assigned areas and times. Sanitation procedures will be in place to continually clean the building and classrooms. Masks are optional for students.

Yellow status would mean that the health department is concerned about student impact. Instruction would change to a blended learning model and would vary based on grade level. Social distancing will become more structured with smaller groups and more structure during on-instructional time. Student precautions would essentially be the same as green, but screening for illness may occur more often. The schedule structure would include in-person and remote learning. There would be limited access with smaller groups for playground lunch, library and gym. Access to the building will be limited and no outside entities would be allowed past the front entrance. Masks would be required for staff and students.

Red status would result from an order to close the school because of COVID incidence in the building by the local Health Department or by order of the Governor. Students would receive direct instruction through remote learning. Students would interact through small groups or online. Teachers and staff would report to school to deliver instruction to students. Masks would be required for anyone entering the building.

The health department will be conducting daily active surveillance throughout the school year in order to quickly stop the spread of COVID-19 in the schools. This will be accomplished in collaboration with each school district and the school nurses. Close monitoring of student health throughout the year will provide early recognition and intervention to keep the virus from infecting the entire student body and staff which would lead to school closure and interruption of in-person

learning. Each school district will distribute their plans to student families when they are finalized in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, it will take the entire community – everyone in the County to keep our economy, our schools and our way of life as normal as possible until the virus no longer poses a threat to us. Thanks to everyone who is doing their part to make this possible.

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