

Pulaski County COVID Update – November 19, 2020

As COVID-19 testing expands and cases increase across the state, health departments struggle to keep up with contact tracing. Delay in tracing has resulted from a number of factors:

- it can take several days for local health department to receive positive results;
- not all lab results are received;
- not all lab results have the correct personal or contact information;
- many people avoid answering the phone or don't give complete information;

Pulaski County Health Center has worked tirelessly to contact each and every positive case as well as all close contacts. However, cases continue to rise. After exploring expedited contact tracing and community mitigation strategies, as a region, we have developed a new approach to contact tracing which will allow positive cases to immediately notify their contacts as soon as they receive positive lab results.

Moving forward, patients do not need to wait for instructions or information from their respective health department. Positive patients should refer to the 'COVID Patient Guidance Tool' that can be found on Pulaski County Health Center's Facebook Page and Website. An e-mailed copy can be requested by calling (573-736-2219) or emailing (pulaskicovid@gmail.com) Pulaski County Health Center.

While we will still be completing case investigations for positive cases that are reported, the positive patient will be expected to notify their contacts. This will eliminate the wait time and hopefully, stop people from unknowingly spreading the virus. We are also hopeful that people will feel more comfortable telling their contacts about their positive result versus a stranger on the phone.

Pulaski County Health Center will continue to assist places where outbreaks are more likely to occur, such as: businesses, schools, and long-term care facilities.

Beginning tomorrow, Friday November 20th, Pulaski County Health Center will no longer be calling close contacts of positive cases. We will focus efforts on case investigations and household contact quarantine. If you get a call from your doctor with a positive result, you need to take immediate action to slow the spread of the virus within your friends, family and coworkers by following the outlined steps on 'COVID Patient Guidance Tool' handout. Please DO NOT wait for a call from the health department to implement your own contact tracing.

You will need to notify everyone with whom you have had close contact. A close contact is anyone that you were within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes within a 24-hour period starting 2 days prior to becoming symptomatic, regardless of cloth face coverings. It does not have to be a constant 15 minutes. even (5) 3-minute visits or 15 1-minute visits are considered close contact. If you had to do that today, how many people would that be?

Please take action now to reduce that number on a daily basis. Keeping your distance from those outside of your household is important in limiting the spread of COVID-19.

The Pulaski County Health Center has observed clusters of positive cases at office buildings, group gatherings and long-term care facilities. We have also seen numerous cases from household exposures to a known case.

We are urging everyone to continue to take responsibility for their own health and to protect others. Please reconsider hosting or attending gatherings that bring together people that are outside of your normal interactions, especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained. These activities are high risk for transmission of the virus. Please adhere to physical distancing recommendations and limit contact with others outside of your household.

In addition to limiting social interactions, the Pulaski County Health Center is still strongly recommending that everyone take precautionary measures to reduce the spread of the virus.

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Adhere to all social distancing recommendations and do not be within six (6) feet of others outside of your household for more than fifteen (15) minutes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating. If not available, use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- It is recommended that face coverings be worn when in contact with someone outside of your household within six (6) feet for more than 15 minutes. Cloth face coverings offer some degree of protection against large infectious droplets, such as mucus or saliva, when speaking, sneezing, or coughing. This particularly protects those around the person wearing the face covering. It also helps those who are unknowingly infectious from spreading it to others.

Cloth face coverings are not considered an acceptable substitute for social distancing. Interactions within six (6) feet of a positive case for more than fifteen (15) minutes will be considered exposure regardless if either person is wearing a cloth face covering.

Cloth face coverings should be washed after each use. Cloth face coverings should be replaced frequently as consistent washing will degrade the fabric and decrease the effectiveness.

It is important to always remove face coverings correctly and wash your hands after handling or touching a used face covering. For more information, visit:

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

As this situation changes, the Pulaski County Health Center will be posting additional information on our Facebook page on a regular basis. If you have questions, please consult a factual source, such as <http://www.CDC.gov> or www.health.mo.gov/coronavirus. The community can also call MDHSS 24-hour hotline (877) 435-8411 to address questions or concerns related to COVID-19.
