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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HERKIMER COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADJUSTS COVID-19 PROTOCOLS IN RESPONSE TO HIGH VOLUME OF COVID-19 CASES

HERKIMER, NY: A sharp rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in Herkimer County has resulted in an inability for the New York State Contact Tracing Initiative and the HCPH Nursing Service staff to contact all county residents who have received positive results or were quarantined due to close contact.

HCPH Director Christina Cain has asked that all county residents follow the new NYSDOH and CDC recommendations for isolation and quarantine. If documentation is required to fulfill the needs of county residents and their employers or schools, isolation and quarantine attestation documents are now available on our website.

Any county resident who requires documentation for quarantine or isolation orders/release may download and print the appropriate form(s) at <https://www.herkimercounty.org/> on the COVID-19 page. Note there is one form for attesting that you were isolated due to positive test, and a separate form for attesting that you quarantined due to close contact.

Herkimer County Public Health is adopting the new CDC recommendations, in alignment with the NYSDOH, on isolation and quarantine due to new scientific data available on the COVID-19 Omicron variant. Pursuant to these changes, everyone who receives a positive COVID-19 test result, regardless of vaccination status or symptoms, is to self-isolate for 5 days and notify their household and other close contacts, whereby day 0 is the date of first symptoms or positive test result, whichever comes first. If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolving and you have had no fever for 24 hours (without fever-reducing medications), you may leave your place of isolation on the 6th day. You must continue to wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days after you exit isolation. If you have continuing fevers or your symptoms are not improved or worsening, you should contact your medical provider for advice.

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Close contacts of positive cases should self-quarantine for 5 days from the last exposure in alignment with [NYSDOH guidelines](#) and monitor for symptoms. If you develop symptoms, you should begin an isolation period. Common symptoms include but are not limited to: sore throat, runny nose, congestion, cough, fever, loss of taste or smell, fatigue, nausea/vomiting and diarrhea. If vaccinated and boosted (or vaccinated but ineligible for a booster) you are exempt from quarantine, but should wear a well-fitting mask for a full 10 days and monitor for symptoms. If you are able to/plan to test during quarantine, the 5th day after exposure is the recommended testing day, although this is not a requirement.

Most school districts in the county have been provided rapid antigen tests for students and staff, and some schools may elect to follow the “Test-To-Stay” protocols developed by NYSDOH and the CDC to allow asymptomatic children who were exposed to attend school during their quarantine period, if they test negative on certain days. Please note that not all districts have the resources to implement these procedures, but HCPH is working in partnership with the NYSDOH, BOCES, and schools to support districts that are able to do so. HCPH recognizes the vital importance of keeping our children in the classroom, and we continue to work with districts in any way we can to support their efforts to implement “Test-To-Stay” in a safe and sustainable manner.

NOTES ON NEW 5-DAY PERIOD MASKING AND TESTING

Please be aware that although the highest period of infectivity is now known to be early in the course of a COVID-19 infection, proper mask wearing is **absolutely essential** to prevent further spread of the virus after exiting the new shortened isolation and quarantine periods, as many individuals will still be carrying small amounts of infectious viral material after they complete their 5-day period. Rapid antigen testing is a reliable, but not infallible, way to determine if an individual is likely to still be carrying any infectious virus material. While HCPH does not recommend utilizing valuable testing resources to regularly screen individuals who are already positive and isolated, in *select circumstances*, such as when those individuals may come into contact with sensitive populations (e.g. immunocompromised individuals), upon exiting the new 5-day isolation period, antigen tests may be utilized, per CDC guidance, to screen for reduced likelihood of infectivity. If the result of a properly-administered rapid antigen test is negative, the likelihood of continued infectiousness is greatly reduced.

A high-quality well-fitting mask that seals well against the face, over the nose and under the chin, is the best way to prevent viral material spread and reduce the risk of exposing others when you have exited your new shortened isolation and/or quarantine period. Together we can move forward as a community in implementing these new policies, but they will only be successful if we take individual responsibility for the safety of ourselves, our loved ones, and our community.
