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For Immediate Release
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Elizabethtown, NY. Two more positive case of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Essex County, bringing the total number of cases to seven. One of the confirmed positive cases is a student who has since returned to their university residence in another state. ECHD is coordinating isolation of this individual with health officials in that state and is conducting contact tracing to cover the time they were in the county. The remaining six confirmed cases are under isolation orders here. Another 34 residents are under quarantine due to travel or exposure history. To date, 85 COVID-19 tests have been processed.

One of the questions that the Essex County Health Department is hearing from residents involves disclosing the names of towns where confirmed COVID-19 cases have been identified. We understand that this information is important to our community members and that it may be upsetting that we are not releasing locations of COVID-19 cases at this time. We want to explain why we made this decision, and offer assurance that we have resident health and safety at the forefront of everything we do.

PRIVACY
The Essex County Health Department (ECHD) has a duty to protect patient confidentiality as much as possible – and to only reveal as much information as is necessary for public health protection purposes. "Confidentiality may not seem like a concern when releasing just the towns where positive cases are located; however, many of us live in small, close-knit communities," stated Linda Beers, Director of Public Health for Essex County. "When case numbers are so few, naming towns could jeopardize patient confidentiality – especially when other information needs to be released (e.g. potential exposure sites, etc.)."

TESTING
"We have been upfront about the limitations around accessing a COVID-19 test in Essex County. This is a reality for many counties in the North Country region - and for many areas around the country", Beers continued. Because testing is limited, healthcare professionals are prioritizing tests for two main groups:

1. Individuals admitted to the hospital with suspect COVID-19;
2. Front-line healthcare workers and first responders who may have been exposed to COVID-19.

ECHD issued a COVID-19 Testing FAQ on 03/25/20, which clarifies many of the questions about testing. This FAQ can be viewed on our website: https://www.co.essex.ny.us/Health/local-covid-19-notices/

CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19
All confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Essex County are immediately placed under a mandatory isolation order by the Essex County Health Department. Isolation orders ensure that the COVID-19 positive individual remains at home, away from public spaces, and separated from people in their home for the duration of the isolation period. ECHD monitors individuals on isolation twice a day to confirm compliance with the orders.

ISOLATION VS. QUARANTINE

"Orders of Isolation or Quarantine are issued from local health Departments and are different from a doctor's order to self-isolate," explained Susan Allott, Director of Preventative Services for ECHD. "When we use the terms isolation and quarantine, we're only talking about Health Orders of Isolation or Quarantine that come from this department," Allott added.

Health Order of Isolation: person tests positive for COVID-19.

Health Order of Quarantine: person does not have any symptoms, but has returned to Essex County from a Travel Restricted Level 2 or 3 country OR has been in proximate or close contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19.

In both cases, the health department issues the order and monitors the person under that order for 14 days. The goal of these orders is to ensure individuals remain at home to help prevent further community spread.

COMMUNITY SPREAD

The low number of confirmed positive cases in Essex County does not represent what we know to be true – which is that community spread of the virus is occurring. The low number of cases is more likely due to limited testing availability than a lack of COVID-19 in our communities. As such, knowing which towns have confirmed cases of COVID-19 actually provides a false sense of security for our residents, leading to the belief that they are "safe". **We want everyone to consider any public site in Essex County as a potential site of COVID-19 exposure**. Up to two-thirds of COVID-19 infections could be spread by people whose own infections are undetected – either because they remain asymptomatic (meaning they don't feel sick), or because they experience only mild symptoms. These are the situations that are most concerning – not the confirmed positive cases who are mandated to be at home, under surveillance of the health department. Continue to heed the advice to stay home as much as possible; limit trips outside the home to just those to acquire basic necessities, and practice social distancing and frequent handwashing. The virus spreads mainly from close person-to-person contact. The best defense we have right now is to put distance between ourselves and other people.

NEW MEASURES TO KEEP RESIDENTS SAFE

Testing everyone with symptoms of COVID-19 and then isolating positive cases and quarantining their contacts is the best tool we have (currently) to limit the spread of COVID-19. Given this, we realize that the limited availability of tests is frustrating and scary for residents. Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 who are determined to be a "suspect" case by their healthcare provider are being asked to self-isolate. "In order to ensure that we are monitoring these individuals – and equally importantly – identifying potential contacts of these persons – ECHD, in concert with our local healthcare providers, will begin to treat any suspect case of COVID-19 as a confirmed positive case," Beers announced. This means that suspect COVID-19 cases will now receive isolation orders and will be monitored the same way as noted above. Contacts of suspect cases will be placed under quarantine orders. The goal of increasing our surveillance to include physician-evaluated suspect COVID-19 positive cases is to reduce community spread. Beyond ensuring community safety, this is beneficial for those under an isolation/quarantine order, because it provides the documentation necessary for workplace absences,

including accessing NYS guaranteed paid leave. For more about the NYS Paid Leave for COVID-19, visit
https://paidfamilyleave.ny.gov/COVID19.

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