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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Amador County Health Officer Update

Over the past five days, even though Amador County's laboratory-confirmed case count of COVID-19 positive cases remains unchanged at 3, Public Health has observed more COVID-19 related activity in our community. In order to monitor respiratory illnesses more closely, Amador County Public Health is now taking several additional steps.

We have created a program for local clinicians to report patients who present with Febrile Respiratory Illness symptoms. This will help track and educate those who have mild symptoms but who do not meet the criteria for hospitalization or testing for COVID-19. We anticipate broad participation from our medical health providers to aid the Public Health Department's plan during this time.

We continue the ongoing contact investigations for the confirmed cases who reside elsewhere but have had close contacts within Amador County. Those investigations have identified some persons who developed mild symptoms of COVID-19 within a few days after contact exposure and have already recovered. Such individuals are considered to be a 'COVID-19 linked suspect case.' We work in cooperation with neighboring counties in order to conduct these contact investigations as part of the ongoing containment strategies of quarantine (for exposed individuals without symptoms) and isolation (for contacts who develop symptoms).

Unfortunately, testing for COVID-19 remains a scarce resource. State and Federal guidelines prioritize the lab testing. Surveillance testing for those with no or mild symptoms is not available. We understand this can be frustrating. Prioritization ensures the availability of tests for the critically ill and the ongoing safety of hospital personnel.

While it has recently been reported in the news that the lengthy backlog of test results has improved, turn-around time for results still remains long. Even for those who have had a test swab collected, results may take more than a week. This also presents an undesirable challenge to many individuals in our community and in our country as well.

An important aspect of reducing transmission of respiratory illness is to be clear about when it is safe for a recovering patient to return to the community after their symptoms improve. Each of these patients is provided with:

- Education about how to avoid spreading respiratory illnesses to others,
- Directions to self-isolate for at least 7 days after illness onset AND until at least 72 hours (3 days) fever-free without use of fever-reducing medications, and
- Directions to remain isolated for at least 3 days since improvement in respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness-of-breath).

There is new guidance instructing all persons who are out in a public place to cover their nose and mouth. This is to prevent their germs from being expelled onto surfaces or to others. Because medical masks remain scarce, the public is urged to use homemade fabric masks, scarves, neck gaiters or similar coverings and reserve medical masks for healthcare workers and first responders. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

The above measures are meant to expand the already existing community-wide strategies:

- Continuing orders to remain safe-at-home by minimizing trips out of the house and to leave home only for essential purposes
- When out for essential purposes, maintain six-foot social/physical distancing
- Wash hands frequently, using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Stay home if you are feeling sick, and if you need to seek medical care, call ahead

The good news is that so far Amador County has not had any COVID-19 cases that resulted in critical (ICU) illness or death. Two of our three confirmed cases have completely recovered and been released from isolation, and the third did not require hospitalization and is isolating while recuperating at home. However, we need to remain persistently careful, even vigilant, despite the challenges to our lives and livelihoods. Yes, this process has been long and significant for many, but we must continue to cooperate as a community, complying with orders and guidance, to protect ourselves and especially our most vulnerable neighbors, and to minimize the rate of community spread of COVID-19.