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For Immediate Release

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**COVID-19 Update for Jefferson County, March 15, 2020—Original Date
03/17/2020--Updated**

On Saturday evening, March 14, Jefferson County Public Health learned of a new County resident testing positive for COVID-19. This individual is male and in his 40's. His exposure to the virus appears to have been in Seattle where ongoing spread of the coronavirus continues. He is experiencing mild, flu-like illness and is being isolated at home until his infection resolves. A detailed case investigation and contact tracing effort was completed on Saturday evening by Jefferson County Public Health.

Multiple close contacts in Jefferson County have been identified and placed in 14 day quarantine. The purpose of quarantine is to monitor exposed individuals to see if they develop symptoms of infection. If they develop symptoms of infection, they are tested for COVID-19 and kept in isolation for the duration of their infection. This is how the spread of epidemic diseases like the novel coronavirus are slowed and populations at increased risk of complications are protected from exposure. Successful isolation and quarantine takes a community-wide effort. Individuals with COVID-19 recovering at home must be cared for by family and friends. Individuals who are in quarantine must likewise depend on others to supply food and other necessities. **Contact with someone BEFORE they are placed in quarantine is highly unlikely to expose a person to coronavirus. "Contacts of contacts" are not at risk.** The purpose of quarantine is to put a person in isolation BEFORE they become ill and contagious. Most people in quarantine do not develop coronavirus infection. For those contacts placed in quarantine who have been infected with coronavirus, symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) usually start around 5 days after exposure and a person becomes contagious around 6 days after exposure. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 infection, is a "novel" virus – it has only recently made the jump from its animal reservoir (bats) to humans. There is much we still need to learn about the virus including the risks of "asymptomatic transmission" (spread by people, including children, who are infected but have no symptoms) and how long people are contagious after they recover from the infection. This is the subject of intensive world-wide research. As we learn more, we will incorporate that new knowledge into our communicable disease control strategies. **What we know now is the majority of infections (in the 90% range) are spread by people who are infected and have symptoms.**

In addition to the new case and multiple contacts, an additional possible case of COVID-19 linked to the new case is under investigation. This individual is in isolation and testing results are pending. Testing turnaround time is now around 48 hours.

This case represents the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in a County resident whose test specimen was collected in Jefferson County and sent to the U of WA lab. Like the other two Jefferson County residents with confirmed COVID-19, this person's exposure was likely in Seattle, the current national epicenter of the novel coronavirus pandemic. **Community-level transmission of coronavirus has not yet been confirmed in Jefferson County but is likely in the near future.**

All Washington State schools are closed effective March 17, 2020 and gatherings greater than 250 are

prohibited statewide. Many events have been voluntarily cancelled during this period of uncertainty. **This is an important time for all Jefferson County residents to learn careful infection control.** Coronavirus is spread by droplet transmission. A person with the infection who is ill coughs out droplets that contain virus particles. These virus particles can be inhaled or come in contact with the eyes, nose or mouth of someone who is in close proximity to them (less than 6 feet). More often, these infectious particles land on environmental surfaces AND/OR the infected individual coughs into his/her hands and then touches an environmental surface. The virus can remain viable on these surfaces for hours to days. Staying away from people who are sick and actively coughing **AND** washing or sanitizing your hands before touching your face or eating food with your hands is a **VERY EFFECTIVE** way of avoiding coronavirus infection (and dozens of other respiratory viruses, including influenza). People who are coughing, for whatever reason, should cover their cough – cough into your elbow sleeve or disposable tissue. Wash your hands after using the tissue. **Influenza is still actively circulating in our community.** All of the Jefferson County Residents who have been tested and found to have negative tests for COVID-19 are infected with other respiratory viruses. This case count is on the Jefferson County Public Health website and is updated on a daily basis. I will be appearing at the Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners meeting on Monday, March 16 at 9:45 AM to discuss the evolving coronavirus pandemic.

The presentation will be live-streamed on Jefferson County’s webpage. To watch, go to www.co.jefferson.wa.us and click on “Videos of Meetings” on the lower left side of the screen. Choose “Streaming Live” or “Recorded.”

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