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The Return of Seasonal Residents to the Upper Peninsula During COVID-19

Consider the risks for full-time residents and smaller capacity healthcare systems

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is a destination for many during the spring, summer and autumn months of the year. During the winter months, life slows down as many residents return to lower Michigan and other parts of the country to get away from the snow and cold. This year, LMAS District Health Department is asking those who may be traveling to the UP to open summer residences or to seek shelter away from areas with more community spread of the virus, to know that they may place others who live and work in the UP at increased risk of the virus, while pushing local health care systems beyond capacity.

According to James Terrian, MD, Medical Director for LMAS District Health Department, “Our tools for combating this disease are few. Social distancing is intended to reduce the spread of the virus from asymptomatic persons we might encounter in our limited public interactions. Self-quarantine will reduce the number of people exposed for those who have had a possible exposure. The length of quarantine, 14 days from last possible exposure, is to assure that the person quarantined does not share any virus. One more tool we have is contact tracing--this is to help folks know and understand that a possible exposure has taken place, and to be very vigilant about potential symptoms, and directing those contacts to be isolated for 14 days to protect others.”

For those returning home to the UP from your winter getaways, please plan on quarantining yourselves at home for 14 days from the time you arrive. To self-quarantine means you stay in place, either at home or elsewhere, for fourteen days because you have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or have recently traveled in areas with widespread community transmission. You should bring essential supplies with you when you arrive or you will need to have someone bring you supplies for your pantry and refrigerator as you should not be going out during the quarantine period.

Everyone needs to understand that while the UP does not have the numbers of positive cases found in more populated areas, the virus is here - even in counties without a confirmed positive case yet, all should assume that the virus is in your community. Please remember that even if you have no symptoms, you may still have the virus and be shedding it to anyone you encounter - grocers, gas station attendants, restaurant employees, just to name a few. About 25% of people infected with the virus have no symptoms. There is one hospital in each of the LMAS counties - each one is critical access only, with no Intensive Care Unit facilities.
Nicholas Derusha, Director and Health Officer of LMAS District Health Department reminds all of us, “As we see more COVID19 cases moving into our region it is more important than ever that citizens follow the Governor’s stay home stay safe order. Please do everything you can to practice social distancing, stay 6 ft. away from others, avoid large groups, make shopping lists and only go to the store when absolutely necessary. Take this time to spend time with your loved ones, family or pets at home or to enjoy our abundant outdoor activities that you can still safely enjoy, but only with those in your own household and being careful to avoid close contact with others. By doing your part you will keep our communities safe and help ensure our healthcare system has the capacity to care for those who are sick.”

For information about COVID-19 in Michigan, please visit Michigan.gov/Coronavirus. For general questions about the virus, please call the State Hotline at 1-888-535-6136. The hotline is available seven days a week from 8am to 5pm. For local updates, please follow @LMASDHD on Facebook and our website LMASDHD.org.

All of us must work together by responding with kindness and patience and a willingness to be inconvenienced to protect our families and neighbors through staying home and staying safe. These are all very important tools needed to slow and reduce the spread of this virus in our counties and throughout the state of Michigan, the country, and the world.

**Stay Home. Stay Safe.**

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