



## **BROWN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH**

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For Immediate Publication: November 17, 2020  
Press Release

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### **Brown County Public Health will join the South Central Regional Coordination Center to do Case Investigation and Contact Tracing**

Karen Moritz RN PHN – Brown County Public Health Director

Brown County Public Health has been doing Case Investigation and Contact Tracing for Brown County COVID 19 cases and contacts since May of this year.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the goals of case investigation and contact tracing have remained the same: To contact people who have or were exposed to COVID-19, help and define people who need to isolate themselves to prevent spreading the virus and educate people on reducing their risk. Each case successfully isolating can prevent dozens of people from contracting the disease.

Brown County Public Health has been very successful with this process until about 2 weeks ago.

We have been efficient and effective in getting cases called and usually interviewed within 24-48 hours and making connections with social and workplace contacts

Through this process we have been able to efficiently work with schools, as well, related to cases and quarantine that affect schools. It has been a great benefit in slowing the spread of COVID 19 in Brown County

Brown County's positivity rate stayed low as compared to the rest of the state until the last 2 weeks. The cases in Brown County have grown exponentially and despite onboarding additional staff we are now at the point where we do not have the capacity to be successful independently.

Our staff is extremely fatigued and it is an insurmountable amount of stress. We are not able to be as comprehensive and have abandoned several of the thorough processes we were doing before the surge in cases. Our experience is not unique; the entire state is experiencing the same thing.

Brown County Public Health has decided to join the already existing South Central Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Regional Coordination Center to get additional support for this work. The coordination center is directed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), which is supported by a

vendor to assist with training and scheduling organization. MDH is working to quickly onboard additional staff to meet the demands of exponential case growth statewide.

By joining this coordination center

- BCPH still maintains the ability to continue to complete Brown county cases as staff are able, once capacity is reached, other staff in the regional coordination center will assist in completing those additional cases.
- We are still able to do the cases in Brown County to our capacity and then other staff in the coordination center will assist us. We expect that for the next few weeks the regional coordination center will still be behind in getting Brown County cases called but they have a greater ability of onboarding and training staff quickly than we do independently.
- We will still be able to work with the school in consultation on all cases and quarantine even if we do not investigate every case
- We will still be able to work with employers and businesses that have cases and need additional assistance with contact tracing and guidance
- There will be less stress on staff
- We will be able to better focus on the other areas of the response ~~as well~~ including preparing for vaccination and prioritized distribution
- If we have staff that are affected by the illness, quarantined, or need to assist their children with any distance learning we are better able to support them.

As we transition to this model and get caught up with case investigation we are asking the public to follow isolation and quarantine guidelines until we can get cases called and work with them on their isolation dates and help them notify their close contacts with quarantine information.

To help with the understanding of isolation and quarantine see below:

Isolation: If you have been diagnosed with COVID 19 you are to stay home and away from other people (even members in your household, unless they have tested positive) for at least 10 days. If you have symptoms of or have tested positive for COVID-19, stay home until all three of these things are true:

- You feel better.
- Your cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms are better, **AND**
- It has been 10 days since you first felt sick, **AND**
- You have had no fever for **at least 24 hours**, without using medicine that lowers fevers.

Your 10 days of isolation starts the day after you started having symptoms or positive test result (if no COVID symptoms) and goes the entire 10 days.

Quarantine

To protect yourself, your family, and your community, you must separate yourself from others, get tested and watch yourself for symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, fatigue, congestion, or loss of taste or smell. If you have been identified as a close contact and are in quarantine, it is recommended to get tested between days 5-7 after last exposure to the confirmed positive COVID-19 individual. Should you remain asymptomatic and receive a negative test result, you still need to complete the total 14 days of quarantine due to still being able to spread the virus or become symptomatic, up to 14 days after last exposure. Unless you have had a positive laboratory test for COVID-19 in the past 3 months, follow these instructions for at least 14 days

after the last day you were in close contact with the person who has COVID-19. Each time you are exposed to an individual with COVID 19 your 14 day quarantine begins again.

To better understand Quarantine please go to : <https://www.co.brown.mn.us/public-health-home>