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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 Variant Identified in St. Joseph County
BHSJCHA Reminds all to Continue COVID-19 Precautions

Coldwater, MI – Two cases of the COVID-19 variant B.1.1.7 has been identified in St. Joseph County. The individuals have been in isolation and close contacts quarantined since initial COVID-19 diagnosis. Variant identification is learned after (initial COVID -19 diagnosis) further testing of the specimen.

The COVID-19 virus, as expected with a coronavirus, has changed over the past year. The SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.7 variant originated in the United Kingdom and has been found throughout the United States, with the first case in Michigan recorded in January. The B.1.1.7 variant spreads more easily and is believed to be more contagious. However, there is no indication that it affects the clinical outcomes or disease severity compared to the original strain.

“Since the variant is more contagious, the virus could potentially infect more people with less exposure”, said Rebecca Burns, Health Officer of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency (BHSJCHA). “Which is why it is imperative our community strengthen prevention measures by wearing masks, physically distancing, avoiding crowds, washing hands frequently and getting vaccinated when it becomes available to you.”

Based on available evidence, current tests and vaccines for COVID-19 also work against this new variant. Protective actions that prevent the spread of COVID-19 will also prevent the spread of the new variant B.1.1.7:

- Wear a face mask around others
- Keep at least 6 feet apart from others
- Wash hands frequently
- Avoid crowded areas or gatherings
- Ventilate indoor spaces if around others
- Seek testing if ill or exposed.
- Follow isolation or quarantine guidance if ill, exposed, or waiting on test results
- Get vaccinated when vaccine becomes available to you

BHSJCHA is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing healthcare, and protecting the environment. For additional information, contact your local health department office or visit www.bhsj.org and follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/BHSJCHA.

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Call for an appointment

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