



HEALTH DISTRICT

Portage County Combined General Health District

705 Oakwood Street, 2nd Floor
Ravenna, Ohio 44266
www.portagehealth.net



Portage County Health District 330-296-9919
Fax 330-297-3597
Portage County WIC 330-297-9422
Columbiana County WIC 330-424-7293

Joseph Diorio, MPH, MS, RS, Health Commissioner

Press release
December 1, 2020

Becky Lehman
Public Information Officer

Portage County Health District Prioritizes Positive COVID-19 Case Investigation Procedures

COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and supported isolation and quarantine remain the cornerstone of an effective public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ongoing high incidence of COVID-19 across Ohio, including Portage County, is a surge in positive cases and exposed contacts that is currently exceeding the capacity of our public health workforce. The surge in positive COVID-19 cases in Portage County has made it necessary for Portage County Health District to revisit COVID-19 positive cases-interviews and contact tracing procedures. The difficult decision has been made to shift internal staff resources to assist with prioritizing confirmed cases of COVID-19 and limit contact tracing activities for close contacts.

Portage County Health District Director of Nursing Rosemary Ferraro states, "This is a Class A Communicable Disease of which has been our goal to begin disease investigations and contact tracing within 24 hours of each new case being reported to us. The alarming increase of new positive cases of COVID-19 makes this goal no longer achievable by our team".

"Staffing for contact tracing has been expanded from four full-time staff conducting disease investigation and contact tracing to the addition of fourteen contracted contact tracers," states Joseph Diorio, Health Commissioner. "The Health District has also retrained five internal staff from Environmental Health and Health Education to assist in disease investigation and contact tracing."

"We continue to work with our K-12 schools and universities to contact positive cases and their contacts for Quarantine," explained Joseph Diorio.

The Ohio Department of Health issued statewide recommendations for prioritizing case investigations and contact tracing as of 11/19/2020:

- Portage County Health District will only contact confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 ages 24 years and younger and 65 years and older reported via the Ohio Disease Reporting System. Limited Interviews will be conducted to determine isolation periods, identify close contacts, and determine the risk of transmission to vulnerable populations. **Confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days from the first date of symptoms (for those with COVID-19 symptoms) or 10 days from the date of their positive test (for those without COVID-19 symptoms). Do not wait for a call from Portage County Health District to start your Isolation period.**
- Portage County Health District is requesting that persons with confirmed positive results of COVID-19 communicate directly with their own close contacts to notify them of possible exposure to COVID-19.

As a result, daily contact monitoring will not occur in most situations. **Do not wait for a call from Portage County Health District to start your Quarantine period.**

People diagnosed with COVID-19 who are having symptoms, as well as those who have tested positive for COVID-19 but are not showing symptoms (asymptomatic), are instructed to Isolate at home. When isolating at home, people should:

- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Monitor symptoms. Seek medical care immediately if having trouble breathing or not able to manage symptoms comfortably at home.
- Stay in a separate room from other household members and pets. Avoid contact with other members of the household and pets.
- Use a separate bathroom if possible. Wipe down surfaces after each use.
- Clean and sanitize any commonly touched surfaces such as doorknobs, remote controls, etc. often.
- Don't share personal household items such as cups, towels, utensils.
- Wear a mask when around other people living in the household.

Individuals who tested positive with COVID-19 may discontinue Isolation and resume normal activities when 10 days have passed since their first date of symptoms, they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medications, AND symptoms have improved.

Individuals with COVID-19 who were asymptomatic may discontinue Isolation 10 days from the date of their positive test.

Close contacts of individuals with COVID-19 should Quarantine for 14 days. A close contact is someone who was within six feet of an infected individual for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, starting from two days before illness onset (or for asymptomatic patients, the date of their test result) until the time the patient is isolated.

During Quarantine, a person should:

- Stay away from vulnerable or high-risk individuals living in the household.
- Monitor their own temperature.
- Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, fever ($\geq 100.4F$), chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting.
- If symptoms start, Portage County Health District strongly encourages COVID-19 testing and follow-up with your primary care provider. If you have chosen to seek out testing, please continue to quarantine until the results of your test are known. Once they are confirmed, further direction from your physician or local health department will be given to you. **Please note that even if your test is confirmed negative, this does not change the recommendation for quarantine. You will still have to observe the full 14 days for your safety and that of the community.**

General questions regarding COVID-19 can be addressed by the Portage County Health District at www.portagehealth.net/COVID-19 or 330-296-9919, ext. 198. Citizen complaints regarding mask compliance can be directed to the Ohio Department of Health call center at 1-833-4ASKODH (1-833-427-5634).