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Promoting an Optimal State of Wellness in Lake County

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 Update: 137 Cases, 36 Active, 3 Hospitalized; Social Gatherings, Close Contact Without Face Coverings Cause COVID-19 to Spread; People that Work in High-Traffic Areas are Getting Sick, but Not Necessarily at Work; Safety Planning and Observance of Precautions Key for Fishing Tournaments

Gary Pace, MD, MPH

Lake County, CA (July 16, 2020) – We now have 137 total cases, with 36 active. 3 are currently hospitalized. The numbers continue to rise locally and throughout the state. COVID-19 activity in Lake County, specifically, continues to be concerning, but the spread has been manageable, thus far.

What Activities Have Proven Highest-Risk in Lake County?

In our contact investigations, three key elements have emerged as significant sources of infections.

First, we have seen several cases where multiple people contracted COVID-19 at a social gathering with family and friends; events where people from multiple households interact on a sustained basis. These types of events are very risky now that the virus is fairly widespread in the community.

Second, if an individual who tests positive had close contact with another person (defined as within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more), we are finding the second person's risk of turning positive is much less when both people are wearing masks.

Third, we have observed that individuals who work in high public contact or social interaction environments are testing positive more frequently than other groups. We have not been able to confirm that they contracted the infection at work in all cases, but frequent social interaction and employment in front-line service industries appear to be strong risk factors.

When thinking about the risk associated with activities, it is important to remember the strongest dividing line, from a public health and safety standpoint, is engaging in activities with people within your own household vs. activities with people outside of your household. The people we work with may tend to be a regular cohort, but we all leave work at the end of the day, and interact with family members and housemates who have, themselves, engaged in various levels of social interaction, and taken variable levels of precautions.

We have been coping with this pandemic for 4 months now, and we are all getting tired. Unfortunately, the cases are increasing, and we are starting to enter a phase we have been worried about the whole time. How destructive it will become really depends on our activity now as a community. We can find ways to continue to live our lives and enjoy the amazing natural beauty of Lake County, but do it in a safe way, where we limit risk to our neighbors, families, and those vulnerable to severe complications.

With the number of cases rising in Lake County, we are particularly concerned about social gatherings where the COVID virus can spread quickly. Some activities are riskier than others, and the state guidelines take this into account.

Each time we document a positive case where the individual had recently been to a social gathering, there is risk we could be facing an outbreak. Our Public Health nurses, contact tracers, staff and clinical partners have done a truly outstanding job of identifying potential pockets of spread early, and intervening with education and testing.

Their insightful work has kept the exponential spread seen in other areas in the region and around the world at bay, but we cannot grow complacent; each spark of infection has the potential to grow, and the most severe outbreaks are fueled by simple things, like getting together in a home environment to mark achievements and family milestones without wearing face coverings.

Fishing Tournaments are a Lake County Fixture – Are They Safe?

Fishing tournaments are normally an integral part of the summer landscape in Lake County, and many adjacent businesses depend on the influx of fishermen to survive and thrive. This year, Clear Lake was named the Best Bass Lake of the Decade by BASSMASTER Magazine (<https://www.bassmaster.com/best-bass-lakes/slideshow/best-bass-lakes-2010s>), so anglers near and far are understandably eager to experience this national treasure firsthand.

Yet, this is clearly not a normal year. Risks associated with long-distance travel and intermingling at group activities, like the weigh-ins and group dinners that typically accompany multi-day bass tournaments, are significant. From a public health standpoint, we have had concern Lake County communities and those organizing these beloved summer events may be best served by waiting until 2021.

The State has continued to issue permits for even large-scale tournaments, and they can be entirely outdoor activities. With safety plans in place, the tournaments, themselves, can be fairly low-risk. Certainly, transmission could happen in stores and food establishments in the area with folks from out of county coming in. However, on Monday, indoor services at bars and restaurants statewide were closed by Governor Newsom; this development further reduces associated risks.

The event organizers for the major bass tournament this weekend have taken steps to eliminate group gatherings, ensure masking and social distancing, and encourage proper disinfection.

We are hopeful participants will follow these guidelines and take the health of our community members into consideration.

Gary Pace, MD, MPH