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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Central Bucks Coronavirus Assessment Proves Negative for COVID-19

After an anxious day in which five schools in the Central Bucks School District closed because of potential exposure to coronavirus, an investigation by county and state health officials has found no evidence of the virus among those who came into contact with an infected person recently.

Provided nobody develops symptoms before their 14-day incubation period ends on Monday, all will be medically cleared, health officials said.

Late Thursday night, Central Bucks Superintendent Dr. John Kopicki, in consultation with the Pennsylvania and Bucks County Departments of Health, ordered the five schools closed for at least one day Friday as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19.

Kopicki's decision came after health officials learned that a person from out of state, who is now known to have coronavirus, attended a recent private gathering at a residence in Central Bucks County.

At the time of that gathering – slightly less than two weeks ago – it was not known to anyone, including the out-of state attendee, that the person was ill with the COVID-19 virus. Confirmation was made at a later date.

Present at the event were children and staff who attend or work at Central Bucks High School South, Tohickon and Tamanend Middle Schools, and Butler and Titus Elementary Schools – the schools that were closed today.

The Bucks County Department of Health led an effort to identify and contact all who attended the gathering, and to check them for any symptoms of illness, such as fever, cough or shortness of breath. A small number of people found to have cold-like symptoms were tested today for COVID-19 at the state laboratory in Exton.

Test results received this evening all proved negative, Dr. David Damsker, director of the Bucks County Department of Health said. He cautioned, however, that because the 14-day incubation period will not end until Monday, “we need to remain vigilant during the rest of the weekend. If all goes well, I would hope we can re-open schools on Monday.”

The results came as good news on a day when Gov. Tom Wolf confirmed Pennsylvania's first two presumptive positive cases of COVID-19: one in Delaware County, the other in Wayne County. Both are adults currently isolated in their homes.

Bucks County still has no confirmed cases of coronavirus. State and local health officials continue to urge residents to practice preventive steps such as:

- Frequent hand-washing with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoiding close contact (within six feet) with people who are sick
- Avoiding touching one's eyes, nose and mouth
- Staying home when sick
- Covering one's coughs or sneezes with a tissue and throwing the tissue in the trash
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces with household cleaning sprays or wipes

Wearing face masks during one's daily routine is not recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as an effective preventive measure against COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. However, people with symptoms of COVID-19, health workers and people who are taking care of an ill person in close settings should wear face masks.

The incubation period for a person exposed to COVID-19 – the time between exposure and first appearance of symptoms – is between two and 14 days. Those who have been in contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or those who have traveled recently to a growing number of countries where there have been outbreaks, are asked to self-quarantine themselves for 14 days from the time of potential exposure.

According to Damsker, the Bucks County Health Department has been paying attention to COVID-19 since December, when early reports of an unknown respiratory illness began emerging from China.

Since the end of January, county health officials have been in frequent contact with the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) and CDC as the situation evolved into a global health response. In early February, CDC began issuing recommendations for travelers returning from overseas areas where there have been outbreaks.

Since then, Bucks County health officials have been contacting all travelers returning here from nations of concern, advising them on self-quarantine, and helping them monitor for symptoms of the virus.

At this time, testing for COVID-19 can be conducted only at CDC and the PA DOH laboratory. It is expected that hospital and commercial labs will have this capability soon as well.

County health officials are working with healthcare providers and PA DOH to determine on a case-by-case basis whether testing is appropriate. This is done in the interest of not depleting resources by testing every person who has a respiratory illness.

Much remains unknown about COVID-19, including fatality rates. Early indications are that children are at much lower risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and, as with influenza, the elderly and those with immunosuppressive conditions are at higher risk of severe illness.

Current reports of fatality rates are most likely overestimates, Damsker said, given that most of those infected have had either asymptomatic or mild infections.

“While that is indeed good news, the other side of the coin is that the virus becomes easier to spread unnoticed in the community by these mildly symptomatic or asymptomatic people,” Damsker said.

“We want people in Bucks County to be aware of the situation, but not panicked,” Damsker added. “We want our residents to continue taking all of the common-sense approaches that we take with influenza, with respect to handwashing often, not touching your face, avoiding sick people and not going to work when sick. Please perform these steps both at home and at work.”

Because there is currently no medication or vaccine for COVID-19, Damsker said, “these simple preventive actions are the most effective tools we have to prevent the spread.”

Please continue to refer to trusted, credible sources of accurate and up-to-date information, including:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- PA DOH: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>