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County of Berks / COVID-19 Leadership Team Press Release

*With COVID-19 case numbers back on the rise, Commissioners urge residents
to take preventative measures*

Reading, PA— 7/27/2020 — After a month of being in the green phase, the Berks County Board of Commissioners is urging residents to heed health and safety recommendations as the county's COVID-19 cases are back on the rise. According to daily statistics provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Berks County has crept back above the goal numbers to enter the green phase within the last 10 days, after remaining under that benchmark for roughly a month.

“While this rise in cases is certainly not surprising, it is sobering nonetheless,” Commissioners’ Chairman Christian Y. Leinbach said. “We must take action now before Berks County continues down the path we’ve seen emerge in the southwestern part of the state. We cannot slide back and need every resident to do what they are able to help stop the spread.”

As of noon today, Berks County has a total of 4,883 confirmed COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic. According to the Department of Health’s COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard, there were 195 newly reported cases between July 17 and July 24, marking an 83-case increase from the prior week’s tally of 113 new cases. That jump in new cases caused a significant increase in the incidence rate as well, which went from 26.9 cases per 100,000 residents to 46.4 cases.

However, the Commissioners stressed the county's positivity rate as the most important, and humbling, statistic. While the number of total tests has increased as testing become more readily available, the rate of positive tests has also increased, from 4.1 percent between July 10 to 16 to 4.6 percent between July 17 to July 24. Berks County has consistently had the highest total positivity rate amongst all counties in Pennsylvania since May 8.

As the Commissioners have watched the staggering increase in cases in the southwestern region of the state, where communities reopened about a month before Berks entered the green phase, they believe now is the time for a renewed focus on prevention.

"We have come so far as a county in the last few months and worked hard to get our numbers down so that we could begin a path toward normalcy," Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt said. "We do not want all of that effort to go to waste now. We need everyone to persevere through this together and continue making the small sacrifices that got us here."

The Commissioners encourage all residents to wear masks or face coverings when in public, to practice social distancing and to work from home as much as possible. COVID-19 still poses a real and serious threat to public health and the economy, so everyone must continue to do their part to mitigate the spread to avoid further shutdowns. While there has been much debate about masks, numerous studies have shown wearing a face covering can greatly lessen and prevent the spread of respiratory droplets from the user. Since bacteria and viruses, like the one that causes COVID-19 dwell within those droplets, it is believed these coverings can reduce the likelihood of spreading the disease. It is important to remember a mask does not protect the person wearing it, but instead protects others from anything the user may be afflicted with.

“The residents and businesses of Berks County have already been ravaged enough by this pandemic,” Commissioner Michael S. Rivera said. “Please do your part to help mitigate any further impact and keep our county open and moving forward.”

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