FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walla Walla County Case Update

Reminder to Stay Home, Stay Healthy, Keep our Community Safe

Walla Walla, WA - Walla Walla County health officials are confirming that Sunday, April 19th, 2020 had the largest spike in daily cases for COVID-19. Over the weekend, we reported six (6) additional cases of COVID-19, five (5) of which resulted on Sunday. The local daily case count for COVID-19 is not at its peak. Seventeen (17) additional residents have tested positive for COVID-19 since we last reported on Friday, April 10th (case count was 20). This brings Walla Walla County’s case count to thirty-seven (37).

“The critical point of information we want the greater Walla Walla Valley to understand is that we are NOT in the clear and we need to be diligent in staying home,” said Meghan DeBolt, Director. “When or if you are in public spaces, keep 6-feet distance from others, wear a face covering if you cannot ensure this physical distancing, WASH YOUR HANDS, and please, please stop congregating at parks and other spaces – we need your help to keep our community safe.”

“Although the State of Washington has seen a ‘flattening of the curve’, Walla Walla County has not,” said DeBolt. “Now is not the time to rebel against the stay at home orders; we are on the brink of having broader community transmission and need to be diligent for a few more weeks.”

More about the cases: Community of residence, age and sex can be found on our website.

Of these new cases, five are employees at First Fruits, Inc in Prescott. The company has been engaged from before day one of their first case and is going above and beyond on preventative measures. First Fruits told all employees that they did not have to come to work, thus they are able to keep six feet of physical distancing between their team members throughout most of their operation. In areas where they could not further separate team members, face coverings are required. First Fruits worked to supply masks to all employees, but procurement was difficult, and the company could not get enough supply, thus several employees have made masks or face coverings for their co-workers. In addition, First Fruits is screening for symptoms before entry into the facility, and they are cleaning surfaces per CDC recommendations.
“We would like to publicly commend First Fruits, and their CEO Jim Hazen, for being early adopters inputting measures in place to protect their workforce,” said DeBolt. “They put measures in place well before we reached out to them.”

Related to Tyson Fresh Meats (Tyson), to date there are over 90 Tyson employees who have tested positive for COVID-19, eight (8) of these are Walla Walla County residents. The majority of cases live in Benton or Franklin Counties; for an accurate case count, they are tracking cases and their location of contact on their website.

The Department of Community Health has been engaged with both local and corporate Tyson teams since April 6th, 2020 when our Environmental Health Team met with Tyson to discuss their current cases and mitigation measures. Since then, the DCH has been in daily communication with Tyson to ensure the required mitigation measures are put in place; this included a site visit on April 13th, and a robust mitigation plan that is reinforced by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries guidance.

All mitigation measures were required to be implemented by Monday, April 20, 2020. Today, our team is inspecting the site again to monitor implementation. Any findings or discrepancies will be reported tomorrow.

“In addition to the prevention measures we have required Tyson to implement, we are also requiring Tyson to allow the DCH to test all employees for COVID-19,” said DeBolt. “This will give us a good picture of disease prevalence and will help to screen out asymptomatic cases or those who are just beginning to show symptoms.”

This testing will take place within the next week and, after testing, all employees will be required to isolate at home until test results come back. “This may require the plant to close for a day or two, depending on when the testing can take place and how long it takes to get results back,” said DeBolt.

“Quickly identifying cases, getting them isolated, along with their household members, and quarantining their close contacts is critical to our public health response to COVID-19,” said DeBolt. “We hope to see additional testing capacity within our community in weeks to come.”

On this note, we want to remind our community once again to please be responsible and take these precautions seriously. As a community, we can control the spread of this virus.

We need to stay home, stay safe. For those who are part of our communities’ essential services, thank you and please be careful. Remember:

- **Stay Home.** All nonessential workers have been asked to stay home. For everyone, if you are feeling sick with mild symptoms and do not need to seek medical care, stay home while you recover.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash.
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

*Always working for a safer, healthier and thriving Walla Walla County*
Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
Clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched.
Take care of your health overall. Staying current on your vaccinations, including flu vaccine, eating well and exercising all help your body stay resilient.
Stay Informed. Consult the websites below for up to date information and steps to protect yourself.

Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. If you are sick and plan to seek care, please call before going in for care so arrangements can be made to prevent exposing others. For urgent medical needs, call 911. You can also call our COVID-19 hotline at 509-524-2647.

For more information:

- Washington Department of Health: https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus
- WHO page: https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus
- Department of Community Health: https://www.co.walla-walla.wa.us/government/health_department/index.php

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