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Growing Data Show Hispanic/Latino Communities Being Hit Disproportionately by COVID-19
Health Department Officials focus efforts on prevention

Hartford, Mich. – Among the ways we all have experienced the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on our community and our nation, COVID-19 has also exposed the toll that crisis and systemic health inequities continue to have on Hispanic and Latino communities in Van Buren County. Recent data from Van Buren county indicates Hispanic/Latino individuals are being hit disproportionately hard by COVID-19. Though Hispanics make up only 11% of the population in Van Buren County, as of July 14, 2020 they account for more than half (56%) of all positive COVID-19 cases. In the State of Michigan, the percentage of overall cases identified as Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is 8%.

In response to the exposed disparity, Van Buren/Cass District Health Department is employing additional focused strategies to increase prevention awareness, testing availability and accessibility, and connect communities of color to other resources that support basic needs like food and housing.

Public health research has long proven that the conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play contribute to their health. These conditions, over time, lead to different levels of health risks, needs, and outcomes among some people in racial and ethnic minority groups. Factors such as living conditions, work circumstances, underlying health conditions and lower access to care can impact health outcomes and are often exacerbated during public health emergencies. As originally reported in National Public Radio (NPR)’s report, “What Do Coronavirus Racial Disparities Look Like State by State?” Dr. Alicia Fernandez, a professor of medicine at the University of California San Francisco, whose research focuses on health care disparities, noted like African-Americans, Latinos are over-represented in essential jobs that increase their exposure to the virus and that dense, multi-generational housing conditions [which tend to be more common among Latino/Hispanic families] make it easier for the virus to spread.

Still, nearly 40% of COVID-19 positive cases are occurring amongst primarily white, non-Hispanic individuals. It’s important that all community members take the necessary precautions to help prevent
transmission of COVID-19 to themselves and others. This is truly a prevention effort that requires the collective effort of all.

The following are actions individuals, families, and communities can take to reduce the risk of COVID-19:

**Individuals**

- **Social Distance.** Keep six feet (6ft) away from others wherever possible and respect others’ space.
- **Wear a mask.** Wear a non-medical mask or face covering when in public.
- **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands frequently with soap, scrubbing for at least 20 seconds.
- **Sanitize surfaces.** Disinfect high touch surfaces daily. Remove visible soil and dirt from surfaces using soap and water and apply disinfectant. For effective sanitizing, wait the proper contact time as indicated on the product label.
- If you’re sick, stay at home and isolate yourself.
- If you have had contact with somebody who tested positive for the virus, consider self-quarantine.

**Families**

If you have older adults living at home, or family members with medical conditions, consider these additional steps to protect them from possible infection:

- **Travel alone if possible.** Try not to bring children with you. They are more likely to touch things in public and could carry those germs back to your home.
- **When returning home from work, change your clothes and shoes and wash your hands, especially if you’ve had any interaction with others.** Children who go to childcare should take these same steps.
- **Even inside your home, it’s important to maintain social distancing as best you can.** If possible, spend time in separate rooms from vulnerable family members. If you cannot, try to stay six feet (6ft) away when in the same room.
- **If prayer is part of your family’s mealtime routine, pray without holding hands.**

**Communities**

- **Faith, family, and cultural institutions:** Empower and encourage individuals by communicating and reminding them of the prevention methods listed above. Your leadership is vital.
- **Employers:** Be proactive and specific when asking how you can best provide support; Directly ask what you or your organization can do to support employees’ unique needs; Make room for people to care for themselves (give explicit permission to take time to care for themselves and their loved ones); and make it a point to intervene in the moment by challenging underlying biases and assumptions. Ensure your workplace accommodations align with best practices for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and that employees are following the individual guidelines while at work.
- On June 29, Governor Gretchen Whitmer today signed Executive Order 2020-138 and Executive Order 2020-137 to increase access to healthcare through telehealth options and protect migrant agricultural workers living in congregate housing from the risk of outbreaks. The order requires
owners and operators of employer-provided migrant housing licensed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) provide residents with the same safeguards businesses are required to provide workers under Executive Order 2020-97.

If you have reason to believe you may have or have been exposed to COVID-19, testing is available at InterCare and Bronson locations. Visit https://www.intercare.org/covid-19.html and https://www.bronsonhealth.com/coronavirus-covid-19/ to learn more about how to get tested.

For more tips on how to protect yourself from COVID-19, follow Van Buren/Cass District Health Department on Facebook (search “VBCDHD”) or visit www.vbcassdhd.org.

Executive Orders Modifying Telehealth options and Extending Protections for Migrant Agricultural Workers: https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499-533207--,00.html

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