

News Release

For immediate release

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11 County and Tribal Public Health Departments partner to deliver consistent message on slowing spread of COVID-19

With COVID-19 spreading at an uncontrolled rate throughout the region and more school districts shifting their learning models, public health staff from 11 county and tribal public health departments have partnered to present a united message about the difficult decisions that need to be made.

Public health staff from Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis County along with Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe are all part of the collaboration. They have been meeting twice weekly to share information and, perhaps more significantly, combine resources to help each other.

The Arrowhead Region Public and Tribal Health group has produced a flier that was sent to all school districts in the region to share with families. They have also released a radio public service announcement about how we can each do our part to slow the transmission of COVID-19. More joint messaging is coming soon.

The school flier highlights the fact that students' ability to physically attend school and participate in sports depends on the decisions that community members make. This time of year is a time for some crucial decisions that can help support students returning to schools, sports, and a quicker re-opening of businesses. Partners stress the importance of following the Governor's Executive order and advice to keep family gatherings to immediate family members. Be mindful that your 'bubble' may be larger than you think, and consider alternate options for gathering this year – such as visiting through a video platform or postponing celebration activities. All of these steps are aimed at slowing community transmission of COVID-19. Now, more than ever all members of our communities need to take the necessary precautions, not only to get students back in school and protect vulnerable loved ones, but also do their part to not overwhelm healthcare systems by keeping our medical response staff healthy

“When it comes to keeping our students and community safe, having consistent messaging for our greater region is key,” said Michelle Janowiec, a Carlton County Public Health nurse, “and we take that messaging from what we know works based in science and guidance from the state.”

“Our public health agencies in Northeastern MN have been leaders in collaboration, even prior to COVID,” said Kelly Chandler, Itasca County Public Health division manager. “In rural Minnesota, we recognize how scarce our resources can be, and duplication of efforts does not help to provide the most efficient work for our counties, tribes, and most importantly, our community members. We are all in this COVID-19 effort together. “

“The collaboration has extended far beyond the original plan of developing unified messaging for community partners across the region,” said Aubrie Hoover, a St. Louis County Senior Public Health Educator. “Over the past several weeks the group has also become a common place we can turn to for additional resources. It is easy to reach out to the group to ask for examples of communication or safety plans, and within a day have several examples of what others have done from multiple communities across the region.”

"COVID-19 doesn't stay within geographic boundaries, and neither do our public health efforts to slow the spread. We are working with neighboring counties and tribal nations to learn from each other and amplify our voices," said Tracy Gilsvik, Public Health Supervisor with Lake County Health & Human Services. All of the messaging provided by the Arrowhead Region Public and Tribal Health group is based on guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Centers of Disease Control (CDC).

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For additional comments from local public health representatives regarding school guidance and communications, please contact:

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