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*Inclusion Through
Diversity*

"Promoting excellence in County operations while respecting the needs of the people we serve."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County Officials Hold COVID-19 Update, Share Holiday Gathering Guidance

(Ithaca, N.Y., November 17, 2020) - Tompkins County Health Department and Emergency Operations Center officials held a [live streamed COVID-19 Update](#) Monday. Officials detailed the recent increase in positive cases and guidance on gatherings and travel leading into the fall and winter holidays.

The Tompkins County Health Department is [strongly discouraging](#) all non-essential travel and gatherings. Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa stated, "When we talk about gatherings, we're really concerned about people getting together who don't live together — we don't want to bring other families into your bubble, increasing the chance that either party would harm another." Kruppa also reminded the community that the 14-day quarantine is still in place for travelers from non-contiguous states unless they choose to adhere to the recently announced testing and quarantine [guidance](#).

Kruppa shared details about how his family is approaching Thanksgiving. "We have family in another state, but we don't want to risk infecting our family. We're used to Thanksgiving as a multi-generational holiday, and right now that's a setting that is at highest risk for transmitting COVID. Try to be creative about seeing each other without gathering in your home." Legislator Martha Robertson shared her experience hosting a Seder via Zoom for Passover last spring, with guests joining from across the country and even Mexico, stating "there are many things to be thankful for, and planning to be together next year is one of them."

Kruppa also spoke to the current healthcare system capacity, sharing that while there is more demand at The Shops at Ithaca Mall testing site and they're experiencing some delays, it's important to recognize that we're fortunate to have so much access to testing in Tompkins County and the inconvenience of waiting for a test is small relative to the impacts of the disease. "Testing is our best tool," added Kruppa, in describing the helpful impact of contact tracing efforts to stop the further spread of the virus.

Regarding the Health Department's capacity for contact tracing, Kruppa stated, "We've been stretched over the last 5-6 days on contact tracing capacity, and staff from other County departments are helping nurses do the calls." He added that while there is currently capacity to meet the need, it's critical that "we slow the spread" to reduce the strain on contact tracing and to reduce the number of hospitalizations at Cayuga Medical Center.

Officials spoke to the guidance and efficacy of wearing [masks](#), clarifying, "Part of the reason you haven't seen us do as many public exposure notices as other communities is that people here are good about wearing masks."

Officials updated the public on plans for vaccine distribution, sharing that vaccine plans have been practiced and in development for decades. Details were outlined, including that there will be prioritization for certain populations and that plans will be adapted based on how much vaccine is made available to the County. Priority populations are likely to include hospital workers and long-term care workers and residents, among other vulnerable populations.

When asked about the vaccine, Kruppa stated, "I trust our processes — between the federal government and our state health experts, we'll be encouraging people to get the vaccine when it is available." Kruppa continued, "We have a vaccine right now that everyone can already have — the flu vaccine. It will help

us to not overburden our healthcare system, and it will keep people healthier as it will be harder for our bodies to fight two viruses than just one.”

The panelists closed by sharing their creative plans for celebrating Thanksgiving this year. Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix shared that “there will probably be a Zoom family gathering, and we’ll use some of the fun Zoom tools — but I’m looking forward to a break and some quiet time.” County Administrator Jason Molino said that while he has a large extended family, they won’t be gathering this year and will be staying home. “We’ll be having Thanksgiving here in Trumansburg and will be finding creative ways to play games and be thankful to have our family safe and close.” Legislator Martha Robertson encouraged the community to “treat yourself and your nuclear group to something special... We are really encouraging folks to stay in your homes this holiday, and to stay safe.”

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