For Immediate Release

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West Virginia Has Yet to Peak, Community Task Force Urges Residents to “Stay the Course”

BUCKHANNON – The Buckhannon-Upshur COVID-19 Community Task Force discussed modeling by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington during its April 7th teleconference. Figures from the institute and reported in statewide media outlets show a slightly earlier peak for West Virginia than originally forecasted, on or around April 16th.

State leaders like Governor Justice and Dr. Clay Marsh, the West Virginia COVID-19 Czar, recognize the positive change in the modeling but stress that now is the time to persevere with social distancing efforts, not let up. The Buckhannon-Upshur COVID-19 Community Task Force agrees.

“I believe our residents need to know that the things we’ve been doing have affected the data in a positive way, but letting up could just as easily affect the data in a more negative way,” said Brian Shreves, Director of the Upshur County Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. “Our community task force strongly recommends that Upshur County residents continue to stay the course and stay informed.”

At a minimum, residents should:

- Abide by the Governor’s stay-at-home order (see https://governor.wv.gov/pages/default.aspx#homeorder for more information).
- Follow social distancing recommendations like the following.
  - Only go out when it is necessary.
  - Plan weekly supply or grocery trips, and when making those trips, allow six feet of space between persons.
  - Check with your neighbors to see if one person on your block can make a single trip for supplies for several households.
  - Send one person per family or group into grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.
- Follow CDC recommendations for wearing cloth masks while in public.
- Remember social distancing guidelines while outside. Keep six feet between you and those around you (except for family units that live together – for example, holding a small child’s hand while taking a walk).
• Continue to practice good hand hygiene with soap and water for 20 seconds, or with alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol.

Many local businesses have implemented social distancing guidelines at their establishments. Task force members praised those efforts and were pleased to report that the implementation of limitations on the number of patrons in Walmart over the weekend went as smoothly as could have been hoped. The task force continues to encourage all operating businesses to implement similar measures.

The task force also discussed updated CDC guidance regarding the use of cloth masks to limit exposure to the coronavirus. Importantly, task force members recognized that the primary purpose of the masks is to limit symptom transmission by those not currently showing symptoms.

The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, like grocery stores and pharmacies, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. The use of cloth coverings will help to preserve surgical masks and other PPE for the medical providers and first responders that need them.

Uphsur County is not an area of significant community-based transmission at this time. However, the task force supports voluntary measures by Upshur Countians to limit spread, and it encourages residents with an interest to visit internet sites such as https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html for information on fashioning cloth coverings.

Other topics included the following.

The Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department noted that, as of Tuesday morning, April 7, Upshur County has had only one positive-confirmed case of COVID-19. Medical providers and first responder agencies reported that personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies are currently adequate, but agencies such as the Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department and Upshur County Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management continue to request PPE from state authorities so that local agencies are ready in the event of a prolonged or escalated local response.

Residents should understand that PPE for medical providers and responders is not the same as the cloth masks recommended by the CDC. Partner agencies, local businesses, and other organizations may have needs for the cloth versions.

If any local organizations or residents would like to donate personal protective equipment, including gloves, gowns, homemade masks, etc., they should contact the Upshur County Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management at (304) 472-4983.
Local medical providers have ramped up telemedicine options, and the task force encourages residents to take advantage of those venues for their medical needs, where appropriate. The task force also compiled a list of available services around the community, which is updated every Tuesday and Friday.

As always, residents should continue to seek information from trusted, reliable sources. Those sources include the CDC (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) and WVDHHR (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx) websites, which contain updated information about the COVID-19 virus. Governor Jim Justice’s website contains information about the state’s response: https://governor.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx. Visit http://www.upshurcounty.org/alert_detail.php and http://buckhannonwv.org/covid-19/, or find both the Upshur County Commission and City of Buckhannon on Facebook for additional information on accessing county and city services.

Partner agencies such as St. Joseph’s Hospital, Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department, Upshur County Schools, the City of Buckhannon, and the Upshur County Commission will also continue to release details specific to their programs and operations through various local media outlets.

As a reminder, according to the CDC, COVID-19 symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure, and include:

- Fever,
- Cough, and
- Shortness of breath.

The Buckhannon-Upshur COVID-19 Community Task Force is a coalition of stakeholders representing the health department, medical providers, the county and city governments, as well as emergency response agencies, educational providers, social services agencies, and civic organizations. The task force also includes representatives from daycare centers, public housing authorities, nursing homes, etc.