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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: All Media

From: Joel Strasz, Public Health Officer – Bay County Health Department
Clarence Sevillian, President/CEO – McLaren Bay Region

Date: December 23, 2020

Re: **WITH COVID-19 CASES DECREASING & VACCINES COMING SOON, BAY COUNTY NEEDS TO REMAIN VIGILANT THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN – With the holidays quickly approaching, and the number of COVID 19 cases in Bay County beginning to drop, the Bay County Health Officer and the President/CEO of McLaren Bay Region (MBR) are urging Bay County residents to come together and continue to take all the actions necessary to blunt the further spread of COVID-19.

According to the Bay County Health Department (BCHD), the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Bay County residents has dropped in nearly half since peaking in November. The percentage of COVID-19 tests performed among Bay County residents that have yielded positive results – known as the test positivity rate – has dropped in half as well. Less than fourteen days ago the Test Positivity rate in Bay County was nearly 19%, today it is approximately 10%.

With this recent surge, healthcare systems across the state, including MBR, have been challenged by a sharp increase in both the number of patients hospitalized for the treatment of COVID-19 and providing routine patient care through this crisis.

“We have made great progress but we still have work to do,” stated McLaren Bay Region president and CEO Clarence Sevillian. “We need everyone to do their part and remain vigilant throughout the holiday season. McLaren Bay Region and Bay County are working as diligently as possible to get the vaccine out to our frontline healthcare workers, first responders and providers in the community.”

“Our goal is simple but ambitious,” stated Bay County Health Officer Joel Strasz. “We need to vaccinate 70% of Bay County residents by the 4th of July, but it will take a short time to get the vaccine out. We need Bay County residents to be cognizant of the risk—both to themselves

and the risk they pose to others—especially if they celebrate the holidays with persons outside of their households.”

MBR will continue safety protocols, including symptom screening of all persons upon entry to MBR facilities and universal mask wearing by all patients and staff, as well as visitor restrictions, which were implemented in October.

While the current surge has significantly slowed, it has the potential to re-emerge and stress the healthcare system as it did in November and early December. It is vital that everyone throughout our community take all the actions necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19.

1. Enjoy the holidays with persons in your own households, but be aware of the risks of spreading and/or getting the virus from others outside of your household. This is especially true for seniors and persons who are at risk to complications of COVID-19 due to underlying conditions.
2. Wear a mask: anytime you might end up being in close proximity to persons from outside your household.
3. Watch your distance: maintain at least 6 feet of separation from other persons whenever possible.
4. Wash your hands: using soap and water for at least 20 seconds or else using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Avoid poorly ventilated spaces: meet outdoors whenever possible if you will be gathering with other persons from outside your household.
6. Avoid crowds: limit the duration of time you spend in public venues and limit your number of close contacts among persons from outside your household.
7. Quarantine when exposed: if you were identified as a close contact to a person deemed infectious, remain at home until 10-14 days (depending on circumstances) have elapsed since the most recent exposure to any infectious person.
8. Get tested: if you develop COVID-like symptoms, seek testing promptly and self-isolate while awaiting results.
9. Self-isolate when infected: if you test positive for COVID-19, remain at home until 10 days have elapsed since the onset of your symptoms (or since testing was performed if you remain symptom free).

Please do your part and help minimize the spread of COVID-19. For the latest and most accurate information regarding the COVID-19 please go to the Bay County Health Department website at <https://www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health/COVID19/>