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Local COVID-19 Testing Event Exceeds Goals; Identifies Growth in COVID-19 Infection Rates

Glencoe MN --- A trio of governmental partners: the State of Minnesota, City of Glencoe, and McLeod County collaborated to host a successful community-wide COVID-19 testing event on August 20 at the Glencoe City Center. The event, which took place from 2:00-9:00 p.m. in the City Center Ballroom, was slated to provide some 750 tests to area residents. By the end of the night, the event had exceeded that goal, conducting a total of 791 tests in the 7-hour time period.

Results from the testing event are as follows: 723 negative results, 61 positive results, 3 “likely positive” and 4 “test not performed.” These results indicate a 7.7% positivity rate (positive tests per 100 tests performed) for those who participated in the event. By comparison, through August 26, the statewide cumulative positivity rate – starting from the first cases back in March -- is 5.5%, and McLeod County’s is 4.4%. The 7.7% infection rate for the event is one sign of a climbing rate of infection among those tested in McLeod since the start of COVID-19 this spring. This means that a higher number of those getting tested actually have COVID-19. This increase indicates that COVID-19 is getting a stronger foothold in our community.

The growth in infection rates in McLeod County has been rapid. The weekly positivity rate for McLeod as recent as the last week of July was a lowly 3.76%. By mid-August, prior to the testing event, it had climbed to 9.18%. From the last week in July through the last week in August, the cumulative number of positive COVID-19 cases in McLeod County climbed from 121 to 347 – more than doubling in 4 weeks.

Another measure of the degree of infection in a community is the number of cases per 10,000 residents. This is a rate many people watch closely because the 14-day average of these rates dictates the degree to which schools can re-open. On July 30, the weekly (not 14-day) rate per 10,000 was 33. As of August 20, prior to the testing event, the weekly rate had already climbed to 79. By August 27, with partial results in from the testing event, the weekly rate was up to 97.

Naturally, this growth in cases will increase the 14-day average that impacts school attendance. While McLeod’s weekly cases per 10,000 rate has climbed steadily, it was already on a rapid trajectory upward prior to the testing event. The schools were already having to look at a hybrid/distance combination before the testing event occurred. It’s possible these further increasing rates may cause additional restrictions in school opening. Meghan Mohs, Interim Health and Human Services Director for McLeod County observed, “While this development is frustrating for many, through this testing event, we achieved a more accurate sense of the community rates of infection prior to sending our young people back to school. As a result, we are more able to effectively respond to the reality on the ground and prevent unnecessary infection of our students and school personnel.”

Health and Human Services Building

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The event itself operated very smoothly. Participants in the event received free tests, and were generally in and out of the facility within 10 minutes. Staffing for the event was a mix of State, County, and City staff, state-contracted medical staff, and volunteers. Rich Pohlmeier, District Four County Commissioner, volunteered his time, saying, "It's important we all pitch in to help our community stay healthy. Looking out for each other is what it's all about." Commissioner Doug Krueger, District Two, another volunteer, was impressed with the efficiency of the operation, stating, "The State Emergency Operations Team really knows their stuff. They are so skilled in running these events."

McLeod County wishes to thank all the volunteers, including those from neighboring Meeker and Sibley Counties and Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services. Large area employer Seneca Foods was also active in promoting and coordinating the event. Kwik Trip generously donated snacks to fuel the operation.

With new positive cases identified, McLeod County Public Health will be conducting some of the subsequent case investigation and contact tracing, and assisting isolated or quarantined individuals in meeting any basic needs they would otherwise be unable to meet due to COVID-19-19 infection or exposure. The knowledge this new information provides will allow state and local authorities to better manage the situation county-wide. The testing event has helped to uncover an existing problem that to this point has been only partly visible.

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