



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 spreads at separate small gatherings

Kannapolis, N.C. – A wedding. An Easter family gathering. Birthday parties. Cabarrus residents held these gatherings over the past two weeks. And now, the Cabarrus Health Alliance (CHA) is investigating COVID-19 outbreaks at each event, with more than 18 people infected.

In most of these cases, the number of attendees was below 10, which highlights the need for following all the recommended guidelines, according to Erin Shoe, Chief Operating Officer at CHA, Cabarrus County’s public health authority.

“Less than 10 isn’t some magic number that prevents the spread of the virus,” Shoe said. “There’s a reason for the Stay-At-Home Proclamation (put into effect by the County and municipalities on March 26 and revised on March 31), and there are real, consequential effects of not following that order and socializing and interacting in groups outside your family nucleus.”

These types of gatherings are a growing trend locally, according to clinical investigators.

“One of the most frustrating things for our new positive cases is that they tell us ‘yeah, I had a party this weekend’ or ‘I had a get-together this weekend,’” said Dr. Natasha Mofrad, a member of the CHA’s clinical investigation team. “Some people are feeling more comfortable and they are starting to have small gatherings, and then we’re seeing many people (at those gatherings) getting sick.”

The clinical investigation team is charged with initially contacting the person who tested positive. They determine when the sickness began as well as what the patient did and where they went in the days leading up to the onset of symptoms.

“We’re going to ask you about all your household members, their names, their dates of birth, their relationship to you and the last date you’ve been around them and then we’re also going to do that same thing with close contacts,” Shoe said.

That’s when the contact tracing begins.

During that phase, investigators try to identify and notify “close contacts” of the positive case, which means anybody within six feet of the subject for more than 10 minutes in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms.

In the follow up with close contacts, the team makes sure they aren’t developing symptoms and issues quarantine orders to make sure they’re staying home to prevent the spread, said Dr. Elly Steel, another member of the clinical investigation team.

Steel and Mofrad are dentists who joined the clinical investigations team in recent weeks.

The team has identified 35 close contacts associated with the four recent gatherings. Each contact is now under a 14-day quarantine. One of Mofrad's many tasks this week: following up with attendees of the birthday parties.

In Cabarrus, another recent issue involves essential workers going to work sick, which has the potential to cause large outbreaks. Of the positive cases from the four gatherings, six are now out of work, and most of those are essential workers.

It's clear that workplace spread can be devastating. "We've seen people who were in close quarters with co-workers on Wednesday and no one starts having symptoms until Friday, and then all of them are quarantined and stuck at home for two weeks, even though they are doing essential jobs," Steel said.

Added Mofrad: "It's better to send a few employees home sick for two weeks than it is to send the whole department home for that long."

It's important for Cabarrus residents to remain vigilant about following all the recommended guidelines, Shoe said. "And that doesn't just mean having less than 10 people at a gathering. It means staying home. It means wearing masks in public. It means social distancing regardless of where you are.

"It means doing your part to help stop the spread locally."

Resources

The public health command center and phone lines are open all weekend. For questions or concerns, email healthinfo@cabarrushealth.org or call 704-920-1213.

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