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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **COVID-19 Update: With Cases Rising, Vaccine Progress Brings Hope**

*First Pfizer Vaccine Doses to Reach Lake County Next Week*

**Lake County, CA** – COVID-19 cases are rising significantly in Lake County and statewide, but progress surrounding vaccines offers great hope. The approval and shipping processes are underway, and we expect delivery of the first doses in the county sometime next week.

Lake County has now documented 1,215 cases, and 22 people have tragically died. 11 residents are in the hospital right now (7 out of county).

### **ICU Capacity a Significant and Deepening Concern**

Statewide, the number of available ICU beds is decreasing, with approximately 11% vacant at this point. Dropping below 15% in a given region triggers more restrictive “regional stay at home orders,” but the Northern California Region (Lake, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama and Trinity counties) has not entered that category yet.

Projections suggest we will continue to see a significant increase in cases due to the increase in travel and socializing at Thanksgiving. If we are unable to slow the expected spread, we will have trouble caring for everyone, due to inadequate hospital beds and staffing.

The State is preparing for this surge, and helped increase ICU beds by 80 in Northern California. They are also opening a special facility at the Sleep Train Pavilion in Sacramento. This facility can hold up to 220 people, and will serve those that are improving, but not ready to leave the hospital. Local hospitals have surge plans in place, as well, and can expand to some extent, but the availability of qualified care providers tends to be a real limiting factor. Any steps we can take now to prevent the surge will be very helpful in a few weeks.

In light of their worsening caseload and decreasing hospital capacity, Sonoma County has now made the decision to institute “stay at home orders,” effective at 12:01am Saturday, 12/12:

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CAO/Press-Releases/Sonoma-County-to-adopt-Stay-Home-Order/>

The Bay Area region, which includes Sonoma County, is at 16.7% ICU capacity at this point, which is down from yesterday. When they go below 15%, the State will impose region-wide “stay at home” orders. Even though we are in a different region (the Northern California region), the Bay Area and Sacramento are our main transfer sites for hospitalized patients. We are monitoring the situation closely, and if we get to the point local hospitals are unable to transfer patients needing outside care, or we are overcrowded locally, we will need to consider further actions to slow the spread of the virus.

### **First Doses of Pfizer Vaccine Expected to Reach Lake County Next Week**

There is good news on the horizon. The Pfizer vaccine is almost through the approval process, and they plan to ship it out by next week. Lake County is receiving an allotment of 975 doses. The first priority is protecting hospital staff that face repeated exposure working on the front lines. If the surge comes, as projected, they need to be healthy to provide care.

We are going to continue pursuing more vaccine in the coming weeks, and it will be administered in priority order, as determined by the State and the CDC: hospital staff and medical first responders; then nursing home staff; then residents. The second tier of priority includes medical clinic staff, other essential workers (law enforcement, firemen, school staff, other people working in public), and then people at higher risk due to age or medical conditions.

The fact this vaccine was developed so quickly is truly remarkable, yet some people are expressing concerns about its safety, due to its rapid arrival on the market. The FDA approval process has been followed, and before it gets distributed, a group of experts in California will review the studies and safety data.

I plan to get my shot as soon as I am able. At this point, the risk of COVID is far greater than any risk associated with the vaccine. The more people get vaccinated, the sooner we can move back to a more normal life.

### **Wireless Emergency Alert Sent to Some Lake County Residents in Error**

Public Health has been notified some Lake County residents received a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) message indicating a Stay-at-Home Order was going into effect. This message was intended to reach only residents of the Greater Sacramento Region. It does not apply to Lake County. While we remain in the Purple Tier, and COVID-19 activity is pervasive in our communities, no State or Local Stay-at-Home Order has been issued for Lake County at this time.

The next few months are going to be very trying. Please stay home and follow all of the guidelines. Avoid traveling for Christmas, but if you do go see family and friends, definitely take precautions. We are optimistic that in a few months, things will be improving. The vaccine will be getting out there to folks, and the weather will be improving, allowing us to be outdoors more. If we support each other, we will get through these challenging few months together.

Gary Pace, MD, MPH