For immediate release:

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Shifting Focus in Response to COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracing in Plumas County

In response to the evolving situation related to the COVID-19 Omicron variant, Plumas County Public Health Agency (PCPHA) is transitioning to more effective strategies to lessen the impact of COVID-19 by focusing surveillance and prevention efforts on the most severe outcomes of COVID-19.

Scientific data are showing that there is reduced benefit in universal case investigation and contact tracing.

- A large proportion of cases are asymptomatic or less severe due to changes in the virus, widespread vaccination and previous infection.
- Many infections are never identified by public health agencies because persons with asymptomatic or mild cases may not get tested, as well as the increasing use of "over the counter" at-home tests, which are generally not reported to public health agencies
- The highest risk of transmission to others occurring before symptom onset and during the first few days of symptomatic illness (or immediately after first testing positive for those who remain asymptomatic)
- The shorter incubation period of the Omicron variant

Consequently, only a small portion of total cases and close contacts are being reached by public health contact tracers in time to prevent onward transmission of the infection.

Because of these factors, PCPHA will no longer be investigating all COVID-19 cases in detail, but rather focusing on higher risk cases, community/workplace outbreaks, and hospitalizations. Contact tracing will no longer be conducted on all cases.

We now have better tools for COVID-19 prevention and care, and moving forward key public health strategies will include:

- Increasing the number of people who are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations, including booster doses, especially for those at higher risk for severe outcomes
- Continuing strong messaging about the effectiveness of mask-wearing, especially during times of increased community transmission
- Targeting prevention strategies to the most vulnerable persons, populations, and settings, including testing and early access to antivirals and monoclonal antibody treatments
- Availability of testing to support treatment, as a risk mitigation strategy in congregate residential settings, and for individuals to identify their risk of transmission and take appropriate action
- Conducting outbreak investigations and targeted contact tracing as necessary to prevent or understand disease transmission in high-risk settings or among those with more severe illness or unusual illness presentations.

Plumas County is still seeing high case rates, such that individuals with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 can be presumed to be infected with the COVID-19 virus and should initiate timely self-isolation to prevent transmission in the community. Plumas County Public Health Agency remains available to the community for any questions they may have. We are also continuing to ask the community to take the four specific actions that can protect individuals and help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

1. Get Vaccinated: All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in California are safe and effective at preventing serious illness from COVID-19, including from the Omicron variant. Vaccination will protect you and those you love. Californians ages 5 and older are now eligible for vaccination. Additionally, boosters are recommended for everyone 12 years and up. Individuals are eligible for boosters at least five months after their last dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two months after their dose of J & J vaccine. Recent research assessing the effectiveness of the COVID -19 vaccines against the Omicron variant demonstrates that a third dose of vaccine increases the vaccine effectiveness by three-fold. To schedule an appointment, visit myturn.ca.gov or visit https://www.plumascounty.us/2839/COVID-19-Home to see all locations to receive a vaccine in Plumas County.

2. Wear Masks: Masks prevent the spread of COVID-19; upgrade your mask and check for good fit and filtration.

3. Get Tested: You should immediately get tested for COVID-19 if you are feeling any symptoms – regardless of your vaccination status. COVID-19 symptoms can feel like a common cold (including just "the sniffles"), seasonal allergies, or flu.

4. Stay Home if Sick: Stay home if you are feeling sick, test, and isolate for at least 5 days if you test positive. You can refer to California Department of Public Health's isolation and quarantine guidance here: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Guidance-on-Isolation-and-Quarantine-for-COVID-19-Contact-Tracing.aspx