



Wilkes County Health Department & Wilkes Community Health Center

Promoting health and preventing disease in our community

NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Outbreaks in Wilkes County

Currently, in Wilkes County we have two active outbreaks. An outbreak is defined by two or more positives cases in a facility. Wilkes Health is working closely with Wilkes Health and Rehabilitation and Tyson Foods Incorporated.

Yesterday, Wilkes Health partnered with Tyson Foods to test 200 team members. The goal was to help identify team members who are positive for COVID-19 so they could be self-isolated those team members based on the current CDC recommendations, while using these results to get a better sense of the spread in the plant. Tyson Foods is also going to use these numbers to enhance mitigation strategies. Over the next coming weeks, Wilkes Health will continue to work with Tyson Foods to ensure the health and safety of their team members and community.

Tyson Foods reports that it has taken measures to protect employees and decrease the chance of person to person transmission throughout the facility. Some of these measures include, but are not limited to temperature and symptom checks, relaxed attendance policy to reinforce the importance of staying home when sick or to meet childcare needs, as well as restricted visitor access to our facilities. They are also providing personal protective equipment and employing social distancing policies where possible. The plant also reports that they have waived the co-pay, co-insurance and deductible for doctor visits or telemedicine for COVID-19 testing as well as eliminated pre-approval or preauthorization steps.

Wilkes Health is also working alongside Wilkes Health and Rehabilitation. In a long term care setting, a COVID-19 outbreak is defined as two or more laboratory-confirmed cases. An outbreak is considered over if there is not evidence of continued transmission within the facility. This is measured as 28 days after the latest date of onset in a symptomatic person or the latest date of specimen collection in an asymptomatic person, whichever is later. If another case is detected in a facility after an outbreak is declared over, the outbreak is not reopened. It is counted as a case in long term care facility setting, and if a second case is detected within 28 days in the same facility, it is considered a second, new outbreak in that facility.

Wilkes Health and Rehabilitation has tested all residents and staff members. While they still have some results pending, currently only 1 staff member and 3 residents have tested positive for COVID-19.

Wilkes Health has been working with our local long term care facilities since March 9th, in preparation for an outbreak. Wilkes Health has ensured that they have the resources they need from NC DHHS and the CDC. Wilkes Health holds weekly calls with these facilities to answer questions and review any changes in the guidance. Prior to the state mandating restrictions on these facilities, Wilkes Health recommended that they restrict visitors, document visitors or staff who went into each room, and increase cleaning. Wilkes Health has also worked with these facilities to ensure that they appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), and know how to request more.

Wilkes Health is currently reporting 132 cases of confirmed COVID cases in Wilkes County. While, most of these new cases are linked to an outbreak, not all are. "In the coming days and weeks, I anticipate that we will continue to see our case number in Wilkes County continue to rise. Yes, this will be largely attributed to the outbreak at Tyson, however we are still experiencing community transmission in our community as well. While the weather is getting



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nicer, and we have been stuck at home for a while, now more than ever is it important to stay vigilant to the social distancing measures to the greatest extent possible,” stated Rachel Willard, Health Director. “I continue to urge the community to practice prevention measures to protect yourself like washing your hands, covering cough and sneeze, and keeping 6 feet of distance or more from others when you have to be out in public.”

Based on the latest recommendations issued by the NC Department of Health & Human Services, testing is expected to expand in the coming days and weeks. Our public health strategy has needed to be flexible and responsive, and this expanded testing guidance will allow for more testing to occur. Expanded testing will allow us to continue to identify additional cases of COVID-19, isolate them and quarantine close contacts to hopefully break the chain of infection. Expanded testing allows a clinician to test when they suspect a COVID-19 test may help the course of treatment for that patient. We are working closely with the NC Department of Health & Human Services and other partners to ensure testing capacity is increased as we begin to ease restrictions.

Once a positive case is reported to Wilkes Health, public health nurses work on contact tracing to determine a person’s close contacts and instruct them to quarantine. Since we will be expanding testing, that means we will likely identify more cases so we expect our local numbers to increase in the coming weeks.

At this point, we continue to offer tests to individuals experiencing fever and respiratory symptoms. We are not broadly testing people without symptoms in our communities.

If you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, we would recommend you be tested. This means if you are sick with a fever, cough or other mild symptoms, call your healthcare provider or Wilkes Health. **Please do not just show up to a doctor’s office without calling first.** This will help your provider prepare should you need to be tested and lessen the potential exposure to others.

If you have a medical emergency, please call 911 immediately.

Wilkes Health also wants to remind the public that community transmission is happening in Wilkes County. Every person is a potential carrier, even if no symptoms are present, so it’s urgent that every person -sick or healthy- stay home to the fullest extent possible and help break the chain of transmission. Wilkes Health wants to continue to encourage people to protect themselves to help lessen the spread of COVID-19 in our community. There are many ways we can all protect ourselves and our communities.

How to Protect Yourself

- Practice social distancing which means avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people, keeping 6 feet or more between you and others and remaining at home to the greatest extent possible
- Frequent hand washing
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Keep distance from others who are sick
- Avoid touching your face
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces in common areas like doorknobs, remotes, lightswitches, tables and handles
- Wear cloth mask or face covering when out in public where you may be around people like grocery stores or pharmacies.

COVID-19 Signs & Symptoms



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Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure. According to the [CDC](#), people with COVID-19 have had a wide range of reported symptoms.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

People at high risk include anyone who:

- Is 65 years of age or older
- Lives in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- Have a high-risk condition that includes:
 - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - Heart disease with complications
 - Compromised immune system
 - Severe obesity – body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher
 - Other underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as diabetes, renal failure or liver disease
- Pregnant Women

People who are at high risk should stay home to the greatest extent possible to decrease the chance of infection.

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

North Carolina resources can be found on the Division of Public Health website at www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus. To view the case count for North Carolina, including a county map, please visit the NC DHHS website [here](#).

A COVID-19 toll free helpline has been set up to answer general, non-emergent questions at 1-866-462-3821. To submit questions online, go to www.ncpoisoncontrol.org and select “chat.”

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