



## 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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### Contact Tracing Assistance at Wilkes Health

On Tuesday May 5, 2020 Wilkes Health started receiving a little extra help with contact tracing from the nurses at Wilkes County Schools.

Wilkes County School Nurses are assisting the team of nurses at Wilkes Health with contact tracing. Contact tracing is the process of supporting patients and notifying contacts of exposure in order to stop chains of transmission. When a person tests positive for COVID-19, contact tracing identifies who that individual may have been in contact with so those people can take precautions to avoid infecting others. Contact tracing is a core disease control measure that has been used for decades by local and state health departments, including during the response to COVID-19.

"Currently Wilkes County has two active outbreaks, an outbreak is defined by two or more positive cases in a facility. Contact tracing is a key strategy for tracing disease outbreak and helping us get ahead of the curve," said Rachel Willard, Health Director. "Our nurses are Wilkes County's experts doing this essential detective work and slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Our collaborative with the schools nurses from Wilkes County Schools is a critical addition to our county's capability to do contact tracing"

Rachel reached out to Wilkes County Schools Superintendent on Saturday May 2<sup>nd</sup> and by Sunday morning there were 10 school nurses ready to help. "On Saturday I was contacted by our Health Director who asked if our school nurses could assist with contact tracing, or calling people who have had direct contact with people who have tested positive for COVID-19. I sent an email to our school nurses at 4:15pm, and by 6:00pm, I had 9 replies telling me they would be more than happy to help, and the 10th nurse replied to me before 6:00 am on Sunday morning." said Mark Byrd Superintendent of Wilkes County Schools. "This reminded me of what a special group of school nurses we have."

With the significant increase in positive cases of COVID-19 in Wilkes County, as of May 5<sup>th</sup> Wilkes County has had 148 positive cases with 40 of those cases listed as "recovered". 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. With the expansion of testing at Tyson, we will likely identify more cases so we expect our local numbers to increase in the coming weeks. With the increase in local numbers the additional assistance with contact tracing will be beneficial.

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.

If you go out you should practice the three W's: Wear, Wait, and Wash.

- **Wear** a face covering,
- **Wait** 6 feet apart from other people.
- **Wash** your hands often and

### **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**

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



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- 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](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

North Carolina resources can be found on the Division of Public Health website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus](http://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](http://www.ncpoisoncontrol.org) and select "chat."

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