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MEDIA RELEASE

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COVID-19 Omicron Variant Identified in Iosco County

District Health Department No. 2 (DHD2) has been notified by of the presence of the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) of COVID-19 in Iosco County. The variant was detected in wastewater samples collected using community surveillance and the Wastewater Evaluation and Reporting Network, coordinated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and administered by Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU).

The Omicron variant was first identified as a Variant of Concern by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on November 30th. The first case of Omicron in Michigan was identified on December 9th in Kent County. Today, the omicron variant is now considered the dominant strain in the United States, accounting for more than 70% of new cases, federal health officials estimate. Omicron is more easily spread than previous strains of COVID-19, including the Delta variant. Omicron has been recognized as being more easily spread than previous strains of COVID-19, including the Delta variant. Only a percentage of COVID-19 positive test samples are sent on for genetic sequencing that is used to identify the Omicron variant. Therefore, it is likely that there are more unidentified cases of the Omicron variant in Iosco County and the greater DHD2 jurisdiction.

“Preliminary information indicates that while currently available vaccinations are less effective at preventing the transmission of the Omicron variant, they are still useful for preventing serious illness,” said Scott Izzo, DHD2 Community Health Director and Epidemiologist. “Research has shown that some of the best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include mask-wearing while in public, maintaining six feet of social distancing whenever possible, and frequent handwashing. Doing these things in conjunction with getting vaccinated, either for the first time or as a booster dose, is the best way to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19.”

In addition to getting vaccinated and wearing masks – particularly indoors and in crowded areas – other things people can do to protect themselves and their loved ones include:

- Getting tested for COVID-19, especially before gatherings.
- Self-isolating until you recover if you develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.
- Physically distancing from others and avoiding crowds.
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water and cleaning hands with alcohol-based hand rub.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Getting a booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccination when you are eligible to do so.

COVID-19 vaccines are offered at DHD2 and locations throughout the County. To find a vaccine clinic near you, visit <https://www.dhd2.org/vaccine-information> or www.vaccines.gov. To schedule an appointment with DHD2, please call 1-800-504-2650.