FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 12, 2022

HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE PUBLIC TO HELP ALLEVIATE EMS OVERLOAD
High volume of COVID-19 cases straining emergency services, healthcare resources

CUMBERLAND, MD – The Allegany County Health Department (ACHD) is asking the public's help to alleviate the unprecedented strain that COVID-19 and its emerging variants have placed on the area's emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, frontline responders, and hospitals.

COVID-19 infections continue to spread rapidly in Allegany County. Since January 6, Allegany County has confirmed nearly 1,000 new COVID-19 infections which, when combined with COVID-related staff shortages and everyday non-COVID-related community EMS needs, threatens to overwhelm frontline health care providers and our health care system as a whole. Across the state, increased numbers of hospitalizations have led to longer patient wait times in the area's emergency departments (ED), as well as a shortage of available staffed beds in hospitals. Healthcare facilities are being required to triage (sort) patients as they arrive to ensure the sickest receive treatment first.

In light of this unprecedented burden on EMS personnel, hospital staff, and our health system, the Allegany County Health Department is seeking the community's assistance in the following ways:

- Avoid going to EDs for minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, and low-grade fevers. Instead, seek non-emergency care from primary care physicians or urgent care centers.

- Do not go to an ED just to obtain a COVID-19 test. Instead, go to an approved COVID-19 testing site or use a home test kit. You can find a list of testing location at https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/symptoms-testing.

- Limit 9-1-1 EMS calls to possible life-threatening conditions such as:

  - ✓ Chest pains or persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - ✓ Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
  - ✓ Bluish lips or face
  - ✓ Severe pain that is new and doesn't go away
  - ✓ Traumatic injury
  - ✓ Unconscious or altered mental status
  - ✓ New confusion or inability to arouse
  - ✓ Stroke
  - ✓ Overdose
  - ✓ Allergic reaction with swelling and/or respiratory difficulty
  - ✓ Seizure
  - ✓ Diabetic emergencies
  - ✓ Life-threatening mental health issues (e.g., suicidal)
  - ✓ Burns
  - ✓ Childbirth (active labor or complications)

- Get your flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, get a COVID booster, and encourage others to do the same.

- Help limit COVID-19 transmission by socially distancing, washing hands regularly, and wearing a mask.

- Limit exposure to others, especially if there has been close contact with someone known to have COVID-19 or there are COVID-19 symptoms.

In cases of mild symptoms that are likely due to a viral illness, EMTs and Paramedics will evaluate the patient's condition. If the severity of illness is mild, they may advise home care, primary care follow-up, and outpatient testing rather than going to the ED.

By following these guidelines, the Allegany County community can help decrease COVID-19 transmission and, in so doing, decrease the number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. For more information about COVID-19 and related resources, visit health.maryland.gov/allegany or https://covidlink.maryland.gov/content/.

"Our EMS system, hospitals and health care personnel are responding to these extraordinary circumstances and continue to meet the needs of our patients," says Dr. Ted Delbridge, Executive Director of the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, which coordinates the state's EMS system. "EMS Clinicians are available when you truly need them, but please make sure there is a true emergency before calling 9-1-1 or going to the ED."

[more]

UPCOMING COVID-19 VACCINE CLINICS:

Allegany County Fairgrounds, 11400 Moss Avenue, Cumberland, MD

- Moderna Booster Clinic (ages 18+) by appointment only.   Register online by clinic date at the following links:
    - January 19: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
      http://www.marylandvax.org/appointment/en/reg/6091129297
    - January 26: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
      https://www.marylandvax.org/appointment/en/reg/6012927169
- First and second doses of Moderna (ages 18+), first and second doses of Pfizer (ages 12+), and booster doses of Pfizer (ages 12+) are available on a walk-in basis from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. No appointment is necessary.

Allegany County Health Department, Willowbrook Office Complex – Ground Floor, 12501 Willowbrook Road, Cumberland, MD

- Youth Pfizer Vaccine Clinic (ages 5 -11) by appointment only. Register online by clinic date at the following link:
    - January 26: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
      https://www.marylandvax.org/appointment/en/reg/7251910065

For assistance registering for an appointment, county residents can call the COVID-19 call center at 240-650-3999. COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are also widely available in the community at local pharmacies, urgent care clinics, and some primary care providers.

ALLEGANY COUNTY COVID-19 CASE RATE AND POSITIVITY AS OF JANUARY 11:
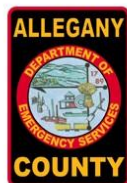
- New COVID Cases: 341 (cumulative total 13,607)
- Additional Deaths: 5 (cumulative total 303)
- Cases Per 100,000 People: 258.46 (Maryland: 200.82)
- Positivity Rate: 29.57% (Maryland: 26.91%)
- Percent of Population Fully Vaccinated: 49.4% (Maryland: 71.2%)

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