FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE VACCINATION AS NEW COVID VARIANT EMERGES

CUMBERLAND, MD –   With the most recent COVID-19 variant – Omicron – making headlines around the world this past week, health officials are urging the public to get vaccinated against COVID as soon as possible and follow up with a booster shot to help stop the spread and continued mutation of COVID-19.

"Viruses mutate during the process of infecting other people," explains Dr. Jennifer Corder, Medical Deputy Health Officer for Allegany and Garrett Counties. "When a new infection occurs, the virus multiplies in the infected person. Each time a virus multiplies, there is a risk of a new genetic mutation being produced. The more widespread and common infections are within a population, the more likely a new mutation will evolve. We are currently awaiting more details about the Omicron variant, to learn more about the consequences of these mutations."

Dr. Corder went on to say that undervaccinated populations create the perfect environment for virus mutations to occur. Those mutations can result in a "variant of concern" which can potentially be more vaccine resistant, easier to transmit, and cause more severe illness than earlier COVID variants. As the percentage of the population that is fully vaccinated increases, the less opportunity there is for the virus to spread and mutate.

Moderna COVID-19 booster vaccine appointments are available for Wednesday, December 8 at the Allegany County Fairgrounds. Interested individuals can register for an appointment at health.maryland.gov/allegany. In order to be eligible for the booster vaccine you must be age 18 or older and meet one of the following criteria:
- Received your second dose of Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago
- Received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) COVID vaccine at least two months ago

The Allegany County Health Department will also offer the following COVID-19 vaccinations at the fairgrounds on a walk-in basis December 1 and December 8 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.:
- first, second, or booster doses of Pfizer vaccine (ages 12 or older)
- first or second doses of Moderna (18 and older).

Free drive-thru COVID testing continues at the Allegany County Fairgrounds Ag Pavilion on Mondays from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., and Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Allegany County COVID-19 case and vaccinations statistics as of November 28:

- New COVID Cases: 132 since Wednesday, November 24 (cumulative total 10,508)
- Additional Deaths: 3 (cumulative total 267)
- Cases Per 100,000 Population: 42.6 (Maryland: 14.29)
- Positivity Rate: 9.51% (Maryland: 4.76%)
- Percent of Population Fully-Vaccinated: 47.4% (Maryland: 67.6%)

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