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For Immediate Release
August 3, 2020

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Health department issues guidance for suburban Cook County, Illinois, to address sustained increases in COVID-19 cases

OAK FOREST - Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) today issued guidance for bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and other gathering places to respond to a new surge in COVID-19 cases in suburban Cook County, particularly among young adults.

The positivity rate is approaching one of the two threshold measures – a sustained increase in the 7-day rolling average in the positivity rate - in the state’s Restore Illinois Mitigation Plan. The positivity rate is a measure of the percentage of people that test positive for COVID-19, averaged over 10 days. On July 31, 2020, the positivity rate was 5.8% in suburban Cook County, up from 5.2% July 22.

COVID-19 rates for people in their 20s are now about 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March, and this age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19.

“We get it. It’s summer. Young people are tired of the restrictions,” said President Preckwinkle. “But the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do to protect themselves and their friends and family.”

Suburban Cook County has not seen a reduction in hospital capacity that would immediately threaten surge capabilities – the second threshold measure - but there have been two consecutive days of increased hospital admissions. As of July 31, 31% percent of ICU beds and 36% of surge beds remain available, above the 20% threshold.

“If we don’t remain vigilant, we will face far more restrictive mitigation efforts and we will see more disease and more death. We are encouraging everyone to follow the ongoing guidelines and businesses to immediately adopt our recommendations, so that they don’t become requirements,” said Dr. Rachel Rubin, Cook County Department of Public Health Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer.

Guidance

Measures include:

- Bars, taverns, breweries and other establishments that serve alcohol for on-site consumption without a retail food license are being asked to serve customers outdoors only.
- Restaurants that serve alcohol need to continue to abide by ongoing COVID-19 guidance and existing regulations.

- Maximum party size and table occupancy at restaurants, bars, taverns, and breweries should be reduced to 6 people (indoor or outdoor).
- Indoor fitness class size should be reduced to a maximum of 10 people.
- Personal service businesses should discontinue services (shaves, facials) that require the removal of face coverings.
- Residential property managers should limit guest entry to 6 people per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

In addition, businesses and workplaces should:

- Institute remote work for high-risk individuals and continue to support telework for as many workers as possible.
- Retail establishments should maintain no more than 50% capacity, which is the current recommendation.

Dr. Rachel Rubin will be available Aug 3, 2020, between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m., to answer media inquiries at the following conference call line:

Dial-in: 415-655-0001

Access Code: 808 500 489

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