JEFFERSON COUNTY UNIFIED COMMAND CENTER UPDATE FOR DECEMBER 2, 2020

Birmingham, AL – The Jefferson County Unified Command Center (JCUC) and its partner agencies continue to help provide information, goods and services to the people of Jefferson County throughout the COVID-19 pandemic response. Dr. Mark Wilson, Jefferson County Health Officer, and Jim Coker, Director of Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency serve as the co-leaders of the Unified Command Center.

Flu Season

So far this year, influenza activity has been slightly lower than this time last year in the 2019-2020 influenza season. Jefferson County has seen sporadic cases in the last three weeks. It is not too late to get the influenza vaccination, and this is recommended for all people who are 6 months of age and older. A flu vaccination can be obtained from your primary care physician, your local pharmacy, and some grocery stores.

Holiday Shopping

The winter holiday season is a busy time for stores and shops. Online shopping is the way to go this year to decrease the chance of spreading or acquiring COVID-19. Large crowds can increase the chance of spreading COVID-19. If you choose in-person shopping for the holidays we recommend the following measures:

- Use contactless services for purchased items, like curbside pick-up.
- Shop in open air markets (but still stay 6 feet away from others and wear a mask).
- Follow all guidance posted at each store to maintain safety for all attendees.
- Wear a cloth face covering or mask while out shopping (face coverings are required in all public places by the current statewide public health order).
- Maintain at least 6 feet of social distance between yourself and other shoppers or store employees (this is also required in the state public health order).
- Wash your hands frequently with either soap and water or alcohol-based hand gels.
- If you are ill, do not go shopping.

COVID-19 Update After Thanksgiving

We are entering a critical and dangerous time in the COVID-19 pandemic. Cases throughout Alabama and the United States are increasing rapidly, and unfortunately, the number of daily deaths is rising all across the country. As we enter into December, Jefferson County and the rest of Alabama have surpassed the worst part of the pandemic that we experienced in July. Unfortunately, we have not yet seen the full effects of Thanksgiving Day celebrations, and this will likely result in a large increase in our number of daily cases, and this will translate into later increases in hospitalizations and deaths. When we reach the December Holidays, our hospital systems will likely be strained trying to provide care for patients with COVID-19 and those with other conditions. Because of that, it is more important than ever to have
limited celebrations with our close family members who live in our household. While the vaccine is on the horizon, it will not be widely available until later in 2021. As a community, we have to take great care to slow and stop the spread of COVID-19 to make sure our hospitals can provide care to everyone who needs it.

**Hanukkah and Christmas Gatherings**

As we continue to move into dangerous territory with COVID-19, it is becoming increasingly important that every effort is made to sensibly limit gatherings that promote the spread of COVID-19. This year, the safest way to celebrate the Holidays is with the members of your own household, and this is a strong recommendation by the Jefferson County Department of Health. Without consistent use of masks, social distancing, and handwashing, even a small gathering of 10 or fewer people from outside your household can result in a large number of people being infected with COVID-19. By avoiding gatherings with people outside of our home, we are protecting our own family and the families of countless others. If gatherings are to occur with people outside of your home, please follow the advice below to make the event safer:

- Have a small outdoor meal with family and friends who live in your community.
  - Even with an outdoor event, remember to maintain 6 feet of social distance and wear masks when not eating.
- Limit the number of guests.
- Have conversations with guests ahead of time to set expectations for celebrating together.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items between use.
- Make hand sanitizer readily accessible for guests.
- If celebrating indoors, bring in fresh air by opening windows and doors, if possible. You can use a window fan in one of the open windows to blow air out of the window. This will pull fresh air in through the other open windows.
- Limit the number of people in food preparation areas.
- Have guests bring their own food and drink.
- If sharing food, have one person serve food and use single-use options.
- If someone becomes ill before the event, they should not attend.
- If someone becomes ill during the event, they should return to their home and move away from others. If a person begins to experience concerning symptoms, medical advice and evaluation should be obtained.

**Have you washed your mask lately?**

Just as a friendly reminder, cloth masks or facial coverings that are re-used multiple times should be washed daily to decrease the chance of contamination and possible inadvertent infection with COVID-19.

**Vaccinations**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is set to review COVID-19 vaccination data from the pharmaceutical companies Moderna and Pfizer. If approved, the earliest doses may be able to be given to frontline healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities, including nursing homes and assisted living. Wide scale distribution to the general public will likely take several months.