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COVID-19 Update: Efforts to Improve Minority Health, New Sector Openings

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, and Dr. Amy Acton, MD, MPH, today provided the following updates on Ohio's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

MINORITY HEALTH STRIKE FORCE PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Governor DeWine today announced initial findings from his Minority Health Strike Force. The team was formed in April in response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African Americans who make up 14 percent of Ohio's population, but represent 26 percent of positive COVID-19 cases, 31 percent of COVID-19 hospitalizations, and 17 percent of COVID-19 deaths in Ohio.

"I am deeply concerned about this data. I am the Governor of all of Ohio, and when I see something disproportionately affecting some of our citizens, I have a responsibility to do something," said Governor DeWine. "To augment on the work that we are currently doing on health equity and to address the immediate threats posed by COVID-19 to our minority communities we intend to move forward with the strike force's recommendations, and we have several additional efforts that are ready to get underway."

Recommendations were created using feedback from the Strike Force's Health Care, Resources, Data, and Education subcommittees. Examples of these recommendations include:

- Establishing culturally appropriate and accessible COVID-19 exposure notification services for communities of color.
- Expanding testing capacity and access for minorities and high-risk populations.
- Using data to prioritize resources in the communities that have the highest need.
- Developing and launching a statewide, culturally-sensitive outreach campaign that educates African Americans and communities of color on COVID-19, health disparities, and social determinants of health.

The Minority Health Strike Force's preliminary report will be available soon at coronavirus.ohio.gov. Final recommendations will be issued on June 11.

NEW POSITION TO ADDRESS HEALTH INEQUITY:

A new position will be created within the Ohio Department of Health dedicated to social determinants of health and opportunity. This person's work will build on several existing efforts to respond to health inequity by working directly with local communities on their specific long-term health needs and Ohio's response to COVID-19.

This person in this position will be responsible for collecting data to inform best practices and for helping to ensure the implementation of the Minority Strike Force's short-term and long-term recommendations.

COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN:

The Ohio Department of Health and Minority Health Strike Force will work with Us for Us to unveil a new communications campaign aimed at Ohio's minority populations called, "Stay in the Fight." This campaign will focus on the need to stay informed, stay involved, and stay inspired during the pandemic.

MINORITY COMMUNITY COVID-19 TESTING:

To expand access to testing, Ohio has partnered with the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers which represents Ohio's Federally Qualified Health Centers, including 55 Community Health Centers at 378 locations. It has multiple mobile units in 68 of Ohio's 88 counties.

"Community health centers have a unique reach," said Governor DeWine. "They are trusted in their local communities to provide primary and preventive care regardless of insurance status or ability to pay, making them critical to any strategy that makes COVID-19 testing available in rural and urban neighborhoods throughout our state."

For testing, individuals should contact their Federally Qualified Health Center or community health center for information and direction about how to be tested.

COMMUNITY WELLNESS KITS

Ohio is partnering with the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers and the Nationwide Foundation to distribute thousands of Community Wellness Kits that contain COVID-19 protection-related items, such as face coverings, hand sanitizer, and soap.

COVID-19 EXPOSURE NOTIFICATION

To support both the state and local health departments in efforts to fight COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact on people of color, Ohio will significantly increase the number of public health workers who can help notify Ohioans of possible exposure to the virus.

The hiring of these public health workers is in progress at both the state and local levels with the goal of hiring individuals who represent and reflect the make-up of their own communities.

MENTAL HEALTH GRANTS

Governor DeWine's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services will award \$1 million in grants to provide mental health and addiction services for hard-to-reach individuals.

The grants will allow faith-based and local community-based organizations to develop culturally appropriate messages that target those who may not be as easily reached by mass-media messaging efforts, such as racial and ethnic minorities, Appalachian and rural communities, older adults, and others.

NEW REOPENING DATES:

Lt. Governor Husted announced several new sector opening dates in Ohio:

- Beginning Tuesday, May 26, miniature golf, batting cages, and bowling alleys may resume operations if they can meet required safety protocols.

- Beginning Tuesday, May 26, skills training for all sports, including contact sports, may resume if required safety protocols can be met. Tournaments, games, and competitions for contact sports are still prohibited.
- Beginning Monday, June 1, catering and banquet centers may reopen if they can meet required safety protocols. Protocols include six feet between tables, no congregating, and a crowd size of no more than 300 people.

Full guidelines to ensure that these sectors operate in the safest manner possible are/will be available at coronavirus.ohio.gov.

CURRENT OHIO DATA:

There are 30,167 confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Ohio and 1,836 confirmed and probable COVID-19 deaths. A total of 5,295 people have been hospitalized, including 1,397 admissions to intensive care units. In-depth data can be accessed by visiting coronavirus.ohio.gov.

Video of today's full update, including versions with foreign language translation, can be viewed on the [Ohio Channel's YouTube page](#).

For more information on Ohio's response to COVID-19, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov or call 1-833-4-ASK-ODH.