January 6, 2021

CATEGORY: **News Release**

RELEASE DATE: **For Immediate Release**

REGARDING: **Summary of COVID-19 in 2020**

In January 2020, COVID-19 felt distant to residents of Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties. Throughout the coming months, however, COVID-19 would significantly alter the lives of people living in all three counties.

On March 20, nine days after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic, Stevens County reported its first positive COVID-19 case. Five days later, on March 25, Ferry County reported a positive case. Soon afterward, on April 2, Pend Oreille County experienced its first positive case. A mere ten days later, on April 12, Stevens County experienced the heartbreaking loss of a community member to COVID-19. This was the tri-county area's first COVID-19 related death.

During the months of March, April, May, and June, the number of new cases of COVID-19 per month for the tri-county area remained in the single digits. The highest number of new cases yet recorded in a single month in the tri-county area occurred in June, with eight new cases being reported. However, with the onset of summer, case counts in all three counties began to climb. By July 24, the tri-county area reached 100 cases of COVID-19 cumulatively and from July 1 to July 31, there were 112 new cases reported within the three counties. In the coming months, the number of new cases would remain high and by late autumn, the monthly new case counts would increase considerably, resulting in the difficult decision to delay the reopening of schools for in-person instruction.

August and September case counts remained stable with a monthly sum of 71 and 76 respectively. September marked the passing of two more Stevens County residents and by the end of October, both Ferry and Pend Oreille had also lost community members to COVID-19 related complications.

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In early November, total cases since March for Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties reached 500 cases. By November 30, the number of cases more than doubled with 1,081 cases reported. Up to this point, investigations of positive cases and close contact tracing had been successfully completed by Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) COVID-19 investigators. However, with the surge in cases this was no longer feasible. NETCHD's COVID-19 investigators began to focus on only contacting positive cases and suspended most close contact tracing efforts.

On December 2, NETCHD reported 71 new positive cases. This broke the 53-case record set the prior week. Soon after, on December 21, our regional hospitals (which include Ferry, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Spokane, and Kootenai (ID) Counties) reported 212 individuals hospitalized due to COVID-19 and 54 of these individuals were in ICU. One week later, on December 28, hospitalizations climbed higher still. Within the regional hospitals, 238 people were hospitalized, 50 of whom were in ICU. Unfortunately, December also confirmed 10 COVID-19 related deaths in Ferry (1), Pend Oreille (1), and Stevens Counties (8), the highest number of COVID-19 related deaths to occur in one month in the tri-county area.

In total, December brought 740 new cases. On December 31, nine months after the first COVID-19 cases were recorded in the tri-county area, the three counties reported a total of 1,821 COVID-19 cases and 24 confirmed COVID-19 related deaths. Of these positive cases and deaths, 175 resided in Ferry County, 462 in Pend Oreille County, and 1,184 in Stevens County. The sobering COVID-19 related death count included two Ferry County residents, four Pend Oreille County residents, and 18 Stevens County residents.

Though 2020 has ended, COVID-19 persists. As we begin 2021 and look forward to the vaccination already occurring in our communities, it is imperative that each of us continues to utilize the measures that we have proven will reduce the transmission of COVID-19. These measures include:

- Wearing a mask or face covering when indoors at public places where it is difficult to maintain physical distancing of at least six feet.
- Staying home when you are sick.
- Staying home and away from others if you are awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test or have been notified that you are a close contact of a positive case (for 14 days since last exposure). It is also critical that if you tested positive for COVID you must isolate for a full 10 days after symptom onset or positive test result before returning to normal activities on the 11th day, and fever must be absent for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications and other symptoms are showing improvement.
- Using good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene in all community settings, including homes, childcare facilities, schools, workplaces, and other places where people gather. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Washing your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you can't wash.

- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth: Germs often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Practicing other good health habits: Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work, or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

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