WARREN COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

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COVID-19 Commonly Misunderstood Situations
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The Warren County Health District (WCHD) understands that there some commonly misunderstood situations that have been spread on social media and on other platforms. Our office wanted to provide some clarification and additional information on these situations to inform the public as to the facts behind these specific situations and what WCHD is doing to prevent these issues before they occur.

1. If a person tests positive for COVID-19 for the first time, they are counted as a "Confirmed" Case. If that person is tested again, are they counted as another (separate) confirmed case, or are subsequent tests not added to the total number of positive cases?

If a person tests positive multiple times, they are only counted as one case. When a local health department receives a new lab result, they first search for that individual in the Ohio Disease Reporting System. The ODRS Basic Data Entry[1] guide explains this on page 6.[1] When counting the number of cases it is based on the Case ID of the individual person. Regardless of how many tests there are, each person will only be counted as a case once.

In addition, a local story by the Cincinnati Enquirer[2] has been published that explains the way that cases are counted in Ohio.[2]

2. Have people that have not taken the test received notification that they received a positive test result?

We are not aware of a confirmed report of this happening in Warren County nor in Ohio. For a lab sample to be sent to a lab for testing, a laboratory form must be filled out including demographic information of an individual. This form is normally completed just before a test is performed and the form is sent with the sample to the lab. It appears that the origins of this confusion may have started in Florida.[3]

For example, at the Pop-Up testing sites that we did at Franklin Community Park and at the Warren County Fairgrounds, the individual being tested held onto all of the copies of the forms until just moments before they were actually tested for COVID-19.

When our medical director is the ordering physician for a COVID-19 test, our office calls individuals to tell them of their test results.

Each of the over 1,300 cases of COVID-19 in Warren County have received calls from our disease investigators after we have reviewed the positive lab result and we have not

[1] https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/ohio-disease-reporting-system/resources/data-entry
[2] https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2020/07/17/fact-check-ohio-counting-multiple-coronavirus-tests-new-cases/5454358002
[3] https://www.sun-sentinel.com/coronavirus/fl-ne-desantis-covid-positive-test-rumors-20200723-vkukr2ge2nhynfye6g45ubusdy-story.html

had a single instance of an individual alleging that the lab result was positive and that they were never actually tested.

3. Are hospitals receiving a monetary incentive for the positive cases they find? If so, is it on a per positive basis? Or, is the monetary "bonus" we have heard about actually to cover the added supplies and staff hours that are needed to deal with COVID-19.

The CARES Act - which was enacted by Congress in March – does have a stipulation that Medicare payments to hospitals are increased by 20% for cases involving COVID-19.[4] COVID-19 positive tests still are processed by licensed laboratories and to intentionally misclassify a case as being COVID-19 would be considered Medicare fraud. Our office receives reports from laboratories for positive cases that are hospitalized. Our office is not aware of any cases of intentionally misclassified as being COVID-19 positive to receive the additional 20% reimbursement for Medicare patients with COVID-19.

Local news reporters have reached out to local hospitals and the Ohio Hospital Association regarding this allegation and there were no indications that fraud is occurring.[5]

In addition, our office investigates each COVID-19 hospitalization to our office to ensure that it is a hospitalization due to COVID-19 and not an individual who has COVID-19 but is hospitalized due to other reasons. A person who has COVID-19 but is hospitalized due to other reasons will NOT appear in the hospitalized counts for COVID-19.

4. Are deaths being attributed to COVID-19 simply because the deceased had a positive test, even though COVID-19 was not actually a contributing factor? For example: A man dies in a motorcycle accident. During the autopsy, they discover that he was positive for COVID-19. Is his death counted as a death to COVID-19?

When a person dies, the cause of death is determined by the certifier, which is most commonly their physician, or in certain circumstances a medical examiner or coroner. The certifier uses their best medical judgement based on the information that is available and their medical expertise. When COVID-19 is reported as a cause of death on a death certificate, it is counted as a death from COVID-19. COVID-19 is not reported on the death certificate if it did not cause or contribute to the death of the person.[6] The CDC National Center for Health Statistics explains how this process works and that many of the data that are available are provisional.[7]

It is also important to understand how death certificates in general work. The Guidance for Certifying Deaths due to COVID-19[8] provides various examples on pages 4 – 6. It is important to understand that there is a difference between the immediate cause of death and the underlying cause of death. The immediate cause of death is the final disease or injury causing the death and the underlying cause of death is a disease or condition present before and leading to the immediate cause of death.[9] These are not changes to

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4 https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr748/BILLS-116hr748eas.pdf ; Sec. 3710 starting on page 371
5 https://local12.com/news/local/fact-check-are-hospitals-overreporting-covid-19-cases-to-get-paid-more-cincinnati
6 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf
7 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/coronavirus/Understanding-COVID-19-Provisional-Death-Counts.pdf
8 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf
9 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/blue_form.pdf

the way that death certificates are issued and the U.S. Standard Certificate of Death provides additional information on what death certificates look like and how they are used.[10]

As to the specific case of an individual dying in a motorcycle accident and also having COVID-19, it appears that this case is from Florida.[11] From reading this case it appears that it was initially misclassified and through additional investigation the death was reclassified as *not* being from COVID-19. In order to prevent these situations, our office investigates each reported death due to COVID-19 to ensure that it hasn't been initially misclassified. These issues will be remedied through the actual death certificate process, however we are usually notified in advance of a finalized death certificate being issued of a death due to COVID-19.

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[10] https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/death11-03final-acc.pdf
[11] https://www.wtsp.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/governor-questions-traffic-fatality-classified-covid-19-death/67-f77eeb4b-b002-40d3-bda8-675c1796df40