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Christine Mallory, Editor

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Meet Your Local Case Investigation - Contact Tracing Team (You are not in trouble!)

By Kitty Mayo



Katie Peck, RN
Wilderness Health

Meet Katie Peck, she may be calling you.

Peck is a nurse and works for Wilderness Health, a team of rural hospitals that includes Lake View in Two Harbors. Currently a big part of her job is reaching out to people in Lake County who have tested positive for Covid-19.

Originally from Stillwater, and now a resident of Duluth, Peck earned her bachelor's degree in Outdoor Education and Recreation at UMD before getting her nursing degree in Vancouver. She has worked as an environmental educator and outdoor guide in Minnesota, California, Alaska, Colorado and Australia, as an EMT in Colorado and is still a volunteer with the National Ski Patrol. She loves adventuring in the Minnesota outdoors with her family.

Now Peck has stepped up to the plate for another adventure, this time one with great implications for the safety of the whole community. Partnering with Lake County Public Health, Peck is a primary case investigator and contact tracer for Covid-19.

When a resident of Lake County tests positive for Covid-19, they land on the "case investigation" list and Peck will be giving them a call, both to check that they are doing okay and offer guidance, and to ask for their help in an effective epidemic containment strategy called contact tracing.

*A "case" is any person who tests positive for Covid-19. A "case investigation" is Minnesota Department of Health lingo for following up with that person.

Sometimes, Peck says people are reluctant to respond openly to a call from a stranger (her) asking about their personal information. However, she says that they usually seem relieved to get guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health to stay home. Peck can even follow up with employers by sending them a letter emphasizing that people should stay home from work if they test positive.

Contact Tracing. The next steps

are to ask a case about where they have been in the days before they took the test, in an attempt to track where they might have passed the virus on to others. They are asked to share the names and phone numbers of people they have been in close contact with.

*Review: Close contact means being within six feet of someone for 15 minutes or more.

Typically the case is asked to inform their household members and friends (those they had close contact with) themselves. If they don't feel comfortable informing a social contact of the positive test, then Peck is able to make those calls.

Challenges that Peck has faced are wrong phone numbers, people not picking up a call, or not responding to a voicemail message.

The purpose of Peck's phone call is two-fold: to see if the case needs any help (she can share recommendations on what to do, connect them to health care resources, or to public health to provide support like how to get groceries during a quarantine or isolation), and to protect the community (through contact tracing, urging those exposed to also isolate and get tested if they have symptoms).

Each case's personal information is protected by HIPPA, a federal law that prohibits personal medical information from being disclosed with consent.

"Our intentions are pure, we want to be a helpful guide to them during this challenging time, and our goals are to collect data to learn more about the virus to help protect everyone," said Peck.

Tracy Gilsvik is another valuable community member working on contact tracing through her role as part of Lake County's Public Health Response Team. Collaborating with the Community Health Board and Lake View, Gilsvik says that Lake County is currently building their contact tracing team even more by adding tracers.

"We are putting more energy behind this because we've learned a lot, and some cases can get really complicated," said Gilsvik.

Here is a fast list of super important things Gilsvik wants the everyone to know:

- You are not in trouble! (if you test positive for Covid-19 and an official-type person calls to "check up" on you) Gilsvik says the contact tracers are really nice, compassionate people who care about the community and really just want to

assist in preventing the spread of the virus.

- Answer your phone! Most of us who see a number we don't recognize won't pick up, but in this case it will be from a local number, so you should at least check.

- Check your voicemail messages! If you can't bring yourself to pick up that random number call, Gilsvik says please (please, please, please!) listen to your message and return the call if it's a case investigation or contact tracing scenario.

- If you have tested positive for Covid-19 and have not talked to any of these people yet, Gilsvik asks you to call Lake County Public Health.

- And again, You are not in trouble! If you have Covid-19 life is rough enough, you will get sympathy from these public health workers, good information, and possibly some help you need.

In preparing for a potential surge of cases this Fall and winter, Lake County and Cook County Public Health have agreed to team up on problem solving whenever necessary.

"Lake and Cook have confidentiality agreements so we can help each other. This could become overwhelming and we need to be prepared. The shared experience, collective knowledge and insight is helping us all learn the best way to manage this," said Gilsvik.

Gilsvik says that with the school reopening plans coming up, work is being done to create guidelines for the potential scenario of a case at an area school, where the county and state will work closely with schools should that happen.

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic Reaches Agreement with Essentia Health to Provide Pharmacy Services to Cook County

SMC patients can have prescriptions delivered either via USPS mail or weekday courier delivery from Essentia Health Pharmacy Services.
Erin Watson, Sawtooth Mountain Clinic

(GRAND MARAIS, MN - SEPTEMBER 1, 2020) Sawtooth Mountain Clinic announced today it has reached an agreement with Essentia Health Pharmacy Services to have prescriptions filled and delivered to patients in Cook County. Deliveries will come one of two ways - either via mail delivery directly to patients' postal mailboxes or weekday courier delivery to Sawtooth Mountain Clinic beginning later this week.

"We are delighted to be able to announce this important agreement with Essentia Health Pharmacy Services to provide service to patients in Cook County while we continue the build out of our own on-site full-service pharmacy," said Sawtooth Mountain Clinic CEO Kate Surbaugh, "While patients have many mail order options for prescriptions, our partnership with Essentia Health allows us to offer our Sliding Fee Scale program through both mail order and courier delivery."

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic recommends that most patients have their prescriptions filled by Essentia Health Pharmacy Services with mail delivery from the USPS. This will allow patients to receive their prescriptions conve-

niently in their own postal mailbox at no extra cost. Patients who want to set up either mail or courier service should call Sawtooth Mountain Clinic for more information at 218-387-2330.

"We ask that people be patient as we set up the new system and deal with the anticipated back-log of requests. If your prescription needs are not imminent, please wait a few days before you contact us," said Surbaugh.

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic is recommending the courier service of prescriptions from Essentia Health-Silver Bay Pharmacy be for those patients with special requirements or who need extra help. The courier service will run Monday through Friday arriving at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic at approximately 2pm. Staff will be available in the SMC Atrium from 10am - 5pm weekdays to distribute couriered prescriptions.

Earlier this year, Sawtooth Mountain Clinic announced plans to open its own full-service on-site pharmacy located at the SMC facility. The build out for the new SMC pharmacy site is currently underway with plans to open in January 2021.