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MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Balancing the Need to Protect the Public with Responsibility to Protect Individuals' Privacy

March 3, 2020 – The Ohio Department of Health, Marietta/Belpre Health Department (MBHD), Washington County Health Department, and other local health departments across the state are committed to monitoring and promoting the public health and welfare. Balancing the privacy rights of individuals with the need to also protect the public's health can be challenging, especially during widespread outbreaks like coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

“As we monitor infectious disease in the community, we share information as necessary to protect the public while also considering the privacy rights of ill individuals,” stated Anne Goon, MS, RD, LD, Marietta/Belpre Health Commissioner. This is true for over 90 infectious communicable diseases that local health departments and Ohio Department of Health monitor, track, and investigate on a daily basis, including coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is now sharing daily updates on Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Starting March 2nd, ODH will be posting numbers of any confirmed COVID-19 cases and PUIs in Ohio each afternoon Monday through Friday at <http://coronavirus.ohio.gov/>.

“We want to be as transparent as possible when it comes to giving the latest information about COVID-19,” said ODH Director, Amy Acton, MD, MPH. “Ohio stands prepared, and we have taken a very aggressive approach to make sure that we are ready if a case does happen in Ohio.” Ohioans in general remain at low risk, and there have been no confirmed cases in the state.

“As we battle seasonal influenza and prepare for the likely spread of COVID-19 across the nation, it's important to remember that there's a lot we can do to protect ourselves from both infectious diseases- and masks aren't required,” notes Goon. “Now is not the time to panic- instead, take this time to prepare and plan ahead for possible interruptions in your day-to-day life. For example, do you have enough food at home for you, your family, and your pets if you must stay at home for 14 days? What will you do if your child's school or daycare closes?”

Washington county residents can slow the spread of infectious diseases by following these precautions:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze (and wash your hands again).
- When you're sick, STAY HOME!

Flu vaccine is still available at Marietta/Belpre Health Department; residents should call (740) 373-0611, ext. 2312, to schedule an appointment to get their flu shot.

Keep up to date with what's happening in Ohio with COVID-19 at <http://coronavirus.ohio.gov/>.

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