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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MERCED COUNTY TO MOVE BACK TO MORE RESTRICTIVE TIER IMMEDIATELY

MERCED— Today, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced that Merced County is to move back to the more restrictive Purple (Widespread) Tier on the State's Blueprint for a Safer Economy, based on the elevated case counts and the rapid rise in the test positivity rate.

Within the last three weeks, the number of daily cases in Merced County has nearly tripled. As a result, the County is not meeting the State's metric to remain in the Red (Substantial) Tier. Reverting back to the Purple Tier will adversely impact some businesses, and activities for county residents will again be restricted. This includes the closure of most indoor services that were authorized to reopen under the Red Tier; however, personal care services are now eligible to remain open indoors. For a full list of impacts to businesses, please see: <https://www.co.merced.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/25797/COVID-19-Risk-Determination-Chart>. The move back to the Purple Tier requires businesses to be in compliance with State guidelines within 24 hours.

The schools that reopened for in-person instruction (under the Red Tier) may remain open, and may continue their gradual reopening plans. However, schools and school districts that have not already opened for in-person instruction will need to obtain a waiver, approved by the Merced County Public Health Officer and the CDPH to open for in-person instruction. Only grades K-6 are eligible to reopen via an approved waiver. To view a complete list of schools with approved waivers, visit <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/ElementarySchoolWaiverConsultations.aspx>

The County will need to remain in the Purple Tier for at least three weeks and must meet the Red Tier metrics for two of those weeks before the State will return the County to the Red Tier. Therefore, all residents are strongly urged to follow safety guidelines, so the County can progress forward in the reopening process. Positive cases continue to be driven by large gatherings and events, as well as spread at unknown locations throughout the community. It is crucial to stay home when you have any symptoms of COVID-19, even if you think it is something else.

Health officials want to remind everyone to limit gatherings and the mixing of different households, especially with the upcoming holiday season. Along with following safety measures, individuals are strongly encouraged to conduct ongoing surveillance testing by getting tested every 14 days to ensure that you do not have the virus. An individual can be asymptomatic and spread the disease without knowing it. Conducting regular surveillance testing can help prevent asymptomatic spread and keep our community safe.

As a reminder, it is still a **local and statewide mandate** to wear a cloth face covering inside of, or in line to enter any indoor public space, or when unable to maintain six feet of social distance outside. Merced County health officials strongly urge all residents to exercise the following safety measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- ✓ Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- ✓ Practice social distancing
- ✓ Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds
- ✓ Use hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol base when handwashing is not possible
- ✓ Stay home and isolate, if you're are feeling sick

A complete list of authorized businesses and activities in Merced County can be found at <https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/>. All business sections are required to follow industry safety guidance, which can be found at <https://covid19.ca.gov/industry-guidance/>. Further COVID-19 information is located on Merced County Department of Public Health's resource website at www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus.

If you are a local Merced County business and have questions, please visit the County's Reopen Merced County website at <https://reopenmercedcounty.com/>

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For more information regarding Merced County, please visit our website at www.countyofmerced.com