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### Health Officer Update - November 24, 2020

With the increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Maryland, Governor Hogan is enhancing enforcement of his Executive Order for wearing facial coverings in public and practicing social distancing. Residents are being asked to use the hotline for reporting violations of his mandate and these will be transferred to local law enforcement and health officers. Additional uniformed state troopers will be available starting the evening of November 25, 2020, to respond to notifications of violations of the order for restaurants and bars to stop serving food or beverage at 10:00 PM for consumption on site. Takeout orders will be allowed from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM. Penalties for violation of the order can result in fines up to \$5,000 and/or jail confinement for up to one year.

Since March 2020, Governor Hogan has pleaded with Marylanders to use COVID-19 precautions and has chosen education instead of a strong enforcement approach for state police to take. It appears that the lack of compliance and the surge in new cases has now changed the approach from education to enforcement.

Governor Hogan and the Secretary of Health have encouraged local jurisdictions to enforce the Executive Order in order to slow the spread of the virus. Some have instituted stronger restrictions and enforced them. But jurisdiction officials are reluctant to be more restrictive than their bordering neighbors because business could flow to the less restrictive jurisdictions. Health Officers of those less restrictive jurisdictions are also concerned there will be more indoor dining and bar patronage in their counties resulting in an increase in cases.

However, Health Officers that are using their delegated authority from the Secretary of Health to temporarily suspend the food license of a facility that creates a health threat by allowing employees to work without facial coverings or wear them below the nose and mouth (making them ineffective) often are criticized for "abuse of power." Businesses complain to local officials but never mention the number of complaints that have been made against them or the number of times the health department has pleaded with them to wear facial coverings properly and consistently.

A customer that witnessed the closure of one food vendor at the Amish Market last week, not only voiced her thanks to the health department inspector at the time, but also wrote an email

explaining that the stories being circulated about the vendors complaints were not true because she saw the entire event. She had also observed the employees of the same vendor not wearing masks properly on many occasions. I mention this because as Health Officer of Talbot County, I get many emails and calls from residents that take all COVID-19 precautions and do not appreciate those that refuse to wear masks and, therefore, increase the risk of infection for everyone.

Please prepare for Thanksgiving by avoiding gatherings, celebrating with household members, wearing masks in public and practicing social distancing.