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Dear Residents,

As we enter our third week of school many of you may still be working from home or even have your school or college age children home with you. Our lives have changed in ways we could never have imagined or experienced because of COVID-19. While so many restrictions have been lifted, I want to remind everyone that it's not over till it's over! Recently we have had large clusters of COVID-19 outbreaks amongst our young teen/adult population who then infect many around them. This can include their parents, younger siblings and grandparents. Not to mention the doctor they see, the gym they frequent, their workplace and more.

As your Health Officer I am writing to ask for your support. Our office has been inundated with calls, emails, and complaints from worried parents and community members. From violations of social distancing to suspected cases of individuals not quarantining. The way we conduct ourselves in this world directly impacts others. I implore you to keep in mind that as more schools attempt to open in the coming weeks, whether we stay open or closed will be determined by our behavior moving forward. I am a parent of two boys, and I understand how difficult it is to manage our very social children. We often hear "kids will be kids" but that's not acceptable during this time. We have the responsibility to keep our teachers, business owners and neighbors safe.

Please talk to your children. See that they pay attention to what they are doing and where they are going. Lead by example and urge them to only do the essentials, wear a mask and social distance as much as possible. Partying students' failure to take precautions against the spread of the coronavirus put at risk not only our schools, but our entire community. Further violations of social distancing precautions will make it impossible for schools to continue in-house teaching and will lead to the cancellation of student events. Parents, keep your children out of class if they attended a large gathering on the weekend. Social media images clearly indicate that these gatherings are occurring with no COVID-19 precautions in place. The thoughtless behavior our office experienced this past week resulted in 26 positive cases which stemmed from students attending parties, partaking in sports events and visiting colleges. A total of 19 young people and 7 adults were infected within our jurisdiction alone with more cases crossing into 4 other counties.

There are many actions you can continue to take during this time. Get your flu shot early and help prevent the spread of respiratory illness. If you travel from a high-risk area, please limit your contact with others and stay home from work and school for 14 days. If you have been told you are a close contact of a COVID-19 positive person, please complete your 14-day quarantine, even if you test negative early on. Also let's not forget if there is a positive case within a household then all siblings and parents must quarantine for 14 days after their last contact with the infected individual. If you do begin to feel ill and are tested for COVID-19, remember to stay home until you receive your test results and complete your quarantine and isolation if necessary.

The school districts have worked hard to make sure the return to school is safe. Please keep them in mind when participating in after school and weekend activities. The Bernards Township Health Department continues to work as hard as we can, but we cannot do our job if residents don't cooperate. We have worked all summer reviewing school plans, attending weekly Zoom conference calls, and conducting training for school nurses with school officials. Please continue to keep the health and safety of your fellow residents at the forefront of your mind. We have all been through so much in the past 8 months, but if we can stay united and care for one another we will come out of the other side of this pandemic stronger than before. Thank you and stay well.

Sincerely,
Lucy A. Forgione, MS, MCHES
Health Officer/Director of Health

The Bernards Township Health Department is the Contractual Health Agency serving:
Bernards Township - Bernardsville Borough - Chester Borough - Long Hill Township - Mendham Borough - Peapack and Gladstone Borough