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Dear Residents,

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year. This past year has been without a doubt one of the most challenging years of our lifetimes. My hope is that 2021 will bring brighter days. This week we reached our highest peak of COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began. In an effort to identify positive cases within our communities, weekly testing sites have been set up within our catchment area to offer testing to residents. If you are identified as a positive case it is important to answer your phone and call back contact tracers. This will ensure you receive the correct information about quarantine time and how to support your close contacts. The Bernards Township Health Department has been working tirelessly to contact trace, educate and stay up to date learning new information concerning the COVID-19 vaccine.

On December 12, 2020, the Federal Drug Administration issued emergency authorization for Pfizer/BioNtech for a COVID-19 vaccine. Moderna soon followed on December 18, 2020. For the first time in many months, we began to feel hopeful as healthcare workers and other eligible individuals started to get vaccinated. Hospitals have been working to vaccinate their workers and pharmacies are taking care of the long-term care facilities. As we approach this point in the pandemic with a vaccine becoming available, many of us have already experienced illness and many have lost their lives or livelihood to COVID-19. We know from prior experience that vaccines will help save lives and turn the page on this pandemic. Vaccines have eradicated smallpox, nearly eliminated illnesses like chickenpox, measles and polio and minimized the impact of countless other diseases. To achieve a similar result from the COVID-19 vaccine, there must be trust and patience in the process.

From the outside it can seem like the COVID-19 vaccine was rushed or is not safe for the public. However, coronaviruses have been studied by scientists for years. With the world's focus fixed on this specific strain of coronavirus, the time, money, and energy to create an effective vaccine was able to come together in a much quicker manner than normal. Both current vaccines on the market are mRNA vaccines. While they do not contain any of the live virus, what they do contain is a set of instructions for the body to combat the COVID-19 virus should a person become exposed. Once you receive the COVID-19 vaccine, the cells in your body "read" the instructions and eliminates the remainder of the vaccine. I encourage all residents to do their own research using reliable resources and get vaccinated if you can when the time comes. Getting vaccinated will help protect yourself and those in vulnerable populations who cannot be vaccinated.

In New Jersey, residents are encouraged to sign up on [NJVSS \(NJ Vaccine Scheduling System\)](#) to be sorted into your phase. With the information you enter, you will be notified when and where you can sign up for your shots. While you are not signed up for an appointment right away, you will be able to schedule in the future. Right now, the site is overwhelmed with the amount of people eligible versus the amount of vaccine in New Jersey.

Over the next few weeks, you will see vaccination clinics pop up at the State and Local level for residents to be vaccinated. At the local level, we are in the planning phase to develop a smooth and efficient clinic within the near future. I urge everyone to remain patient as we wait for vaccine to arrive and to visit <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/vaccine> where there is a plethora of information. While we are working extremely hard, unfortunately we do not have all the answers when it comes to vaccine rollout in New Jersey. We do not get firsthand information from the Governor or the NJ Department of Health, but rather get informed along with the general population. We are not privy to specialized clinics or vaccination allocations and do not know when many clinics will open for appointments. Our office is inundated with inquiries and we do our best to answer and return calls. Please be patient and refer to the weekly news alerts for the most current information.

As your local health department, we are dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of our communities. For us to work at the optimal level for your benefit we need cooperation. Cases have continued to rise within our jurisdictions following the fall and winter holidays. While we are seeing less severe illness, new variants have been causing the virus to spread at a more rapid pace which has led many businesses, restaurants, schools, and childcare centers to close due to staffing or safety concerns. We are all tired and eager to see our future without COVID-19. Continue to wear a mask, continue to wash your hands, and continue to social distance and that future will arrive soon. 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



BERNARDS TOWNSHIP HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019) Weekly Update #60- Resources and Links

COVID-19 Case Graphs per Municipality – Case counts come directly from raw data imported from Commcare by the Bernards Township Health Department.

Somerset County

- [Bernards Township](#)
- [Bernardsville Borough](#)
- [Peapack and Gladstone Boroughs](#)

Morris County

- [Chester Borough](#)
- [Long Hill Township](#)
- [Mendham Borough](#)

COVID-19 Weekly Activity Reports

- Provides data on COVID-19 transmission by six regions in NJ.
- Updated every Thursday.
- Used to determine school exclusion and other re-openings.
- This week NJ is in **HIGH RISK**
- Click [here](#) to view this week's report ending January 16, 2021.
- Click [here](#) to view past week's reports.

NJ COVID-19 Vaccine Resources

- **Pre-Register for the Vaccine through NJVSS (NJ Vaccine Scheduling System) – <https://covidvaccine.nj.gov/>**
- <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/vaccine>
- https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_vaccination.shtml

New Jersey COVID-19 Resources

- <https://covid19.nj.gov/> - Visit this webpage to get information on all things COVID-19 in New Jersey.
- COVID-19 New Jersey Dashboard + Positive Test Results available [here](#). Now including trends, hospital census, long term care facilities, psychiatric hospitals, demographics, contact tracing and school info. Updated daily.
- Somerset County NJ COVID-19 Status Dashboard available [here](#).
- Morris County NJ COVID-19 Status Dashboard available [here](#).
- Phone/Text Lines:
 - 2-1-1 for General COVID-19 questions (7am-11 pm)
 - 1-800-962-1253 for Clinical Questions (24/7)
 - Text NJCOVID to 898-211 to receive alerts
 - Text your zip code to 898-211 for live text assistance

Testing Updates – As of 1/20/21: Click [here](#) for more information on free testing across New Jersey

- **NJ Testing Sites – [click here](#)** for the most up to date information including new locations and testing criteria.
 - **Morris County** – Morris County offers several testing options, [click here to learn more](#).
 - **Somerset County** – Joint testing site with Hunterdon County at Raritan Valley Community College, 118 Lamington Road, Branchburg, NJ 08876. Drive thru testing by appointment only. **In preparation for COVID-19 vaccinations, Somerset County will end testing at RVCC on Wednesday January 27th.** Check status of test site at <http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/covid19status>. Residents of Somerset County ONLY can make an appointment at <https://somerset-hunterdon.adlabscovidtest.com/>.
- Most doctor's offices, urgent cares and hospitals are testing symptomatic patients. If you are feeling unwell, call ahead to your healthcare provider. **DO NOT** just show up to an office, urgent care or ER.
- For more information on testing - [visit the CDC website on testing](#).

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