Burgum urges vigilance to keep COVID-19 numbers trending downward as statewide mask requirement expires Monday

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today urged North Dakotans to remain vigilant against COVID-19 as the state's case numbers continue a downward trend and the State Health Officer's statewide mask requirement expires Monday, Jan. 18.

An executive order that limits capacity for bars, restaurants and event venues also will be modified, effective 8 a.m. Monday, Jan. 18, moving capacity limits and other ND Smart Restart protocols to guidelines, or recommendations. The statewide risk level will remain at moderate, or yellow.

Burgum noted that cities and counties may continue to have mask requirements in place, and the state supports those locally enacted protocols.

"Our case numbers and hospital capacity have improved dramatically in North Dakota over the past two months, and with three new tools we didn't have last fall – vaccines, rapid tests and effective therapeutics – we can see the light at the end of the tunnel," Burgum said. "However, this fight isn't over, and we need all North Dakotans to continue to exercise personal responsibility, follow protocols and keep wearing masks where physical distancing isn't possible. The day will come when we can take off our masks and discard them with confidence, but only if we do what's needed now to keep ourselves, our families and our communities safe."

Since mid-November when the state's COVID-19 numbers peaked and the additional mitigation

measures were implemented:

- Active cases have dropped by over 80 percent, from 10,224 to 1,675;
- Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have decreased by nearly 74 percent, to 88 hospitalized today; and
- The state's 14-day test positivity rate is down roughly one-fourth from its peak, at 4.13 percent today, its lowest level since late August. According to Johns Hopkins University, North Dakota's seven-day positivity rate is now the fourth-lowest rate in the nation, at 4.7 percent.

North Dakota Department of Health Immunization Program Manager Molly Howell also gave an update on the state's vaccine distribution. Among the 50 states, North Dakota ranks No. 2 in the percentage of received vaccine doses administered, at 62%, and No. 4 in first doses administered per capita, with 52,433 doses administered as of Thursday.

A State Health Officer order requiring face coverings originally took effect Nov. 14 and was extended from Dec. 14 to 12:01 a.m. Jan. 18, when it will expire. The extension to Jan. 18 allowed for a 14-day incubation period to pass after Christmas and New Year's to ensure the state wouldn't see a surge in cases, Burgum noted.

"We're grateful for each and every North Dakotan who has done their part to bring these numbers down and save lives and livelihoods," he said.

Guest speaker Dr. Joshua Ranum of West River Health Services in Hettinger stressed the importance of individuals who test positive for COVID-19 to immediately ask their doctors if they're a candidate for early treatment with monoclonal antibody therapies that have been shown to reduce mortality and the need for hospitalization.

For more information on North Dakota's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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