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Dear Residents,

As we enter our third week of school closures and for some working from home, I want to take a moment to connect. Our lives have changed in ways we never previously experienced. I'm sure it is not easy, and you would like to see your near-by friends, elderly parents or family members. I completely understand and feel the same way. However, I urge you not to visit anyone and go out only for essentials like food and medicine. Stay home. Let me give you some examples with which many of us identify.

You're probably thinking, "How much could it hurt if my 23-year-old daughter visits from the city to do her laundry at home?" "My 9-year-old is so bored inside, I can let them have a playdate with their next-door neighbor, how much could it hurt?" "It's my son's 1st birthday and I want to have a few people over to celebrate, it can't hurt." "A few guys are meeting at the park to play basketball," how could it hurt? **It can hurt a lot.**

The only people you should be seeing are those you can't avoid, such as those living with you before the start of the pandemic. Even in your own household, you should still practice all the precautions you can with proper hygiene and distancing when possible.

We must keep ourselves and our families home out of an 'abundance of caution'. The second you step out your door, you must act like everyone is infected. Otherwise, you risk yourself, your family, your friends, your elderly parents, grandparents and the entire community becoming infected with COVID-19.

A few weeks ago, *The Washington Post* released an article with an excellent simulation graphic that showed the benefit of social distancing. View the article [here](#). As the simulation plays, you can see how one sick person can quickly infect dozens demonstrated by the different colored dots. Many cases are mild enough that you might not realize you're infected, and some infected people have shown symptoms after weeks of being asymptomatic. I urge you to start taking those "dots" off the map as you prevent infection, so the virus has nowhere left to go.

Social distancing doesn't mean you don't get to be social. Through technology and other electronic means, we can maintain our social connections and sense of community. I urge you to keep in contact with friends and family and to lean on each other for support. For now, we must create physical distance between one another to prevent the spread of the virus.

What you do not see behind the scenes is that the numbers are accelerating. Expect this to happen. We are not close to the peak that experts are estimating to be 3 to 5 weeks away. The sooner that we can follow social distancing rules, self-quarantine and prevent the virus from having its next host, the faster we will regain some normalcy.

Currently, there is no coronavirus vaccine, but that does not mean we are powerless. The virus itself is weak, needing a host to live in. That means that we as a community can stop this virus in its tracks. We can limit the spread of the virus from person-to-person if we choose to make a change and keep our distance from one another. When you keep getting together in-person, even in what appears to be small harmless groups, you give the virus the power to persist in our community. Do not give it the power. Please stay well, wash your hands, and promote social distancing in your network. Thank you for your continued cooperation in keeping you, your family and community safe from COVID-19.

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