FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NCHD Behind the Scenes with Data Collection

Sterling, Colo. – April 21, 2020: COVID-19 is a concern for all our communities and one of the ways we are battling the spread is with case investigations, data collection and reporting; however, correctly capturing that information has proven to be confusing and time consuming for everyone. We have to keep in mind that this COVID-19 response is unprecedented, something not seen in over a century, not since the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic. Technology and epidemiology have progressed substantially since that time, however due to a number of circumstances, this has proven to involve added complexity in relation to case analysis. We are navigating through uncharted territory, which has been creating quite a few challenges in reporting the best information to the public and media. NCHD wants to explain some of the confusion around the numbers and data.

When viewing the positive or presumptive positive COVID-19 cases for each county on the NCHD website, there are several factors to consider, and the numbers can be somewhat deceiving. The biggest reason for this is that we know from disease specialists and doctors, that there can be anywhere from four to ten times the number of people sick, than have actually been tested. Currently, Morgan County has a significant number of cases listed compared to other counties in the area. The number of cases doesn't necessarily reflect that Morgan County's rate of infection is any higher than neighboring counties, but rather that medical providers there have tested significantly more people than in the surrounding counties, and there are also a couple of localized outbreaks in facilities where the state has provided additional testing resources, leading to an increased case count for Morgan County. Plus, case counts in Colorado include, not only people who have had a lab test indicating they were positive for COVID-19, but also include epidemiologically-linked cases -- or cases where public health epidemiologists have determined that COVID-19 infection is highly likely because a person exhibited symptoms and had close contact with someone who tested positive. Although the number of epidemiologically-linked cases represents a small portion of the total reported, it

does add to the total number being counted. Although new testing alternatives are becoming available, currently there is still a shortage of tests and testing resources are not equal at all facilities across northeast Colorado. Additionally, while there are testing guidelines available, each community and medical provider faces distinct circumstances leading to unique testing requirements based upon availability of supplies.

Another consideration identified is the amount of details provided by NCHD compared to those being released by other counties and the state. We have been asked multiple times to provide additional details about each case including town of residence, gender and age. NCHD is required to abide by HIPAA and protect our clients' health information and privacy. In our rural setting, including this type of information could lead to identification of the individual. In larger communities, these details are not as likely to violate an individual's right to privacy.

Related to this, while it is obviously critical that we always strive to provide the most accurate information, data collection around COVID-19 related deaths is being handled and reported somewhat differently than would normally occur and we have had to adjust to these changes rapidly as an agency. After further investigation and data searching, we have received information clarifying that the death we originally announced last week as a Yuma County resident, is actually being counted in Weld County's statistics. Like all of you, we mourn every loss and each one weighs heavy on our close-knit communities. It is important that we attribute each case accordingly, and we have improved processes and partnerships that will help us validate information and ensure we can provide the most accurate picture going forward.

A final note to point out when looking at the numbers on NCHD's website compared to the state health department's website -- our numbers will be current as of the time posted based on the best information that our case investigations have been able to uncover, where state reporting typically lags a day behind.

All of this serves to further illustrate that the public health actions being taken across the state are done with the ultimate goal of preventing additional illnesses and death. Staying at home except when performing essential functions, practicing good social distancing, wearing a mask

while in public, good personal hygiene and proper sanitation really are our best tools in the fight against COVID-19. The data shows that these things are working and we encourage everyone to keep up their efforts as we all partner with each other in stopping the spread of this virus.