



ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

HON. STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

August 14, 2020

Gale R. Burstein, MD
Commissioner
Erie County Health Department
95 Franklin Street
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Dr. Burstein,

It has come to our attention that your Department's handling of the reported outbreak of nearly 40 new COVID-19 cases in the Town of Eden has caused concern, especially with local government officials who apparently were kept in the dark concerning details surrounding this Coronavirus outbreak. Silence surrounding this serious COVID-19 outbreak is the opposite approach taken when Erie County released public information about numerous cases of Coronavirus across the region.

"Hartman said she has not been told the source of the infection. 'I would have probably liked a little bit more of a heads-up if there was a situation in my town,'" Hartman said. 'However, that didn't occur...'"

Source: Town of Eden Supervisor Melissa Hartman, www.buffalonews.com, County: 38 new Covid-19 cases in Eden came from single source, 8/12/20

Since the beginning of this pandemic, it has been said that communication with community stakeholders is critical and needs to be based on facts. Look no further than "contact tracers" to help halt the potential spread of COVID-19. However, the lack of communication and withholding of facts has caused many people, within and outside of the Town of Eden, to be concerned.

Unlike the secrecy surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak in Eden, the County of Erie and private businesses have publicly disclosed locations where single cases of Coronavirus have been found.

At the end of July, it was well publicized that an outbreak had occurred at New Zion Baptist Church in Buffalo. As a result, a clinic was set up to handle this outbreak and public reports included numerous details about the outbreak to help protect the community.

"Our epidemiology team is working with New Zion leadership to communicate directly with its congregation, inform them of their potential exposure and encourage them and their families to get a free diagnostic COVID-19 test at this clinic," said Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein.

Source: www.wbfo.org, COVID-19 cases at Buffalo's New Zion Baptist Church prompting diagnostic clinic Friday, 7/29/20

There were numerous public reports when a restaurant/bar worker at a Chicago Street establishment tested positive for COVID-19.

"We are working with the Department of Health to ensure proper tracing etc.,"

Source: www.wivb.com, Resurgence Brewing Company employee tests positive for COVID-19, 7/14/2020

Information was publicly disclosed when just one individual tested positive for Coronavirus at a Buffalo based bank.

"The bank said the employee is not one who faces customers on a daily basis; and the bank disinfected potentially impacted areas with Clorox 360 electrostatic disinfectant spray out of an abundance of caution."

Source: www.wkbw.com, corporate employee tested positive for coronavirus, 3/16/20

A local supermarket was also proactive in publicly identifying when an employee tested positive for COVID-19 and shared the numerous steps taken to clean and sanitize

"As a precaution, we are having the store deep cleaned (hospital cleaned), in addition to our normal cleaning and sanitization procedures, since our associate last reported to work on 4/10/20," said spokeswoman Kathleen Sautter in the statement.

Source: www.buffalonews.com, Employee at Tops Market store in East Aurora tests positive for Covid-19, 4/17/2020

The County Department of Health can end speculation and uncertainty about this Eden COVID-19 cluster, who it impacted and steps being taken to contain it, by answering the following questions:

- Where did this cluster occur in Eden? Did it take place on a local farm?
- If so, what precautions have taken place to ensure the safety of food/produce?
- When did you receive confirmation/test results that confirmed 38 new COVID-19 cases in Eden?
- When did the Department of Health notify the Eden Supervisor, Eden Town Board or other government officials in Eden?
- Why was there a delay in notifying these individuals?
- When did contact tracers begin the process of tracking the COVID-19 cluster in Eden?
- In the case of the Eden outbreak, why was it beneficial in this case to withhold information from elected officials in the Town, rather than contact them immediately?
- Are any of the 38 people that tested positive for COVID-19 Erie County employees or elected officials?
- If so, where are their onsite work locations?
- Since numerous social services employees were forced to return to work at various Erie County government buildings, including the Rath Building, have any county employees tested positive for COVID-19 that work at any of these buildings?
- Have any Erie County employees that have either tested positive for COVID-19 or are quarantining come in contact with other employees in the Rath Building or any other building associated with/operated by Erie County government?

Thank you very much for your prompt attention answering these important questions about a very serious issue. If cases of COVID-19 have been publicly disclosed, the same should be done for any Erie County employee or elected official that may have come in contact with fellow county employees at the many buildings we manage.

Sincerely,



Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr.
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER