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More COVID-19 Cases Confirmed;
Residents Strongly Urged to Avoid Church Services
And Other Large Gatherings

Albany, Ga. – As testing for COVID-19 ramps up, more patients have tested positive for the virus. Saturday afternoon, Phoebe was notified that seven additional patients, who were screened at Phoebe’s main hospital in Albany, tested positive for the virus. Five of the patients remain hospitalized. Three are recovering at home. “These are community-acquired infections, and there is evidence that a number of these patients had contact with each other before being hospitalized. We have been working with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to investigate the connections between these patients so DPH can work to notify others who may be at risk,” said Steve Kitchen, MD, Phoebe Chief Medical officer.

The number of COVID-19 cases is increasing rapidly throughout Georgia, and state officials are more strongly urging people to practice social distancing – avoiding crowds and staying six feet away from others, when possible. State officials on Saturday urged churches to cancel worship services. “Until we know more about the pandemic, we advise people not to gather unless there is a compelling reason. This is a disease for which we don’t have a cure or a vaccine. It’s especially critical for those at high risk of complications, such as those with chronic conditions and the elderly,” said Charles Ruis, MD, Southwest Health District Health Director.

Phoebe continues to care for other patients under investigation (PUI) for COVID-19, and more positive tests are likely. “While we all need to be concerned and vigilant, today’s positive tests
should not induce undue alarm. We expected more positive cases, and we know additional
cases will be confirmed in communities across the state," Ruis said.

Phoebe has established a process to track and notify employees who have had contact with any
COVID-19 patients as soon as possible after a positive test is confirmed. Phoebe is following
return-to-work guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
(CDC). So far, no one potentially exposed to the virus at a Phoebe facility has tested positive
for the virus.

"Phoebe is taking extraordinary measures to protect employees and other patients. When a
PUI is moved from a room, we are using cleaning procedures that meet or exceed CDC
disinfection guidelines for COVID," said Scott Steiner, Phoebe Putney Health System Chief
Executive Officer. "We stood up a Coronavirus Task Force weeks ago, and our Incident
Command Center has been in operation since Tuesday. Today, dozens of leaders are in that
command center directing operations and planning the most effective ways to deal with this
health emergency moving forward," Steiner added.

Phoebe and DPH are working together to make screening for coronavirus more efficient and will
announce details once a plan is finalized. For now, COVID testing is not advised for people
without symptoms. “Certainly, anyone in respiratory distress and anyone who believes they’re
suffering a medical emergency should call 911 or go to an emergency center right away. It is
not recommended anyone with mild symptoms go to an ER to seek testing,” said James Black,
MD, Phoebe Medical Director of Emergency Services. Individuals with symptoms should call
ahead before going to a primary care physician or urgent care to be checked.

“Negative does not mean immune. A negative test means you’re negative at that moment. It
doesn’t mean you won’t test positive later. Individuals who have been in close contact with
confirmed or symptomatic COVID patients should not let their guard down. Be on the lookout
for symptoms and consult a healthcare provider if symptoms develop,” Dr. Ruis said. COVID-19
symptoms include fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness such as cough and
difficulty breathing.

Other essential COVID-19 information includes:

- Social Distancing
- Get a Flu Shot
- Take Standard Precautions
  - Avoid people who have respiratory illness, if possible.
  - Stay home when you are sick.
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes with tissue, and place tissue in the trash.
  - Keep unclean fingers away from eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Keep surfaces clean with household detergent solution.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, or with commercial
    sanitizers.
- Adhere to wise travel plans.
- Avoid panic and avoid stockpiling medical supplies.
- Do consider obtaining a 90-day supply of prescription drugs.

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