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## PRESS RELEASE

### **MOHW Advises on Increased Cases of COVID-19 and Respiratory Illnesses**

Belmopan. December 30, 2022.

The Ministry of Health & Wellness (MOHW) informs the public that over the past two weeks there has been an increase in COVID-19 cases, from 69 cases reported over a seven-day period in the first week of December 2022 to 271 cases reported between December 19 and 27. The current projections from the Epidemiology Unit at the ministry show a rise in cases into the new year, with a peak by mid-January. The ministry also notes an increase in influenza (flu) cases that cause similar symptoms to COVID-19.

Currently, China is experiencing a significant increase in COVID-19 infections, with up to 32,000 cases per day and an average of 93 deaths per day, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. It is known that when a virus is circulating as fast and as widely as this is, there is a concern for mutations of the virus.

In Belize, the majority of the cases being reported are in the Belize District; however, there are increases in the other districts. Although the number of hospitalized cases has not overloaded the health system, there is always the possibility of this happening if public health measures are not being followed.

The ministry reminds the public that it is influenza season. One of the most effective ways to prevent the flu or a severe outcome of it is through vaccination. The flu vaccine is part of the regular schedule of vaccines for children below five years of age, as well as the rest of the population. Please ensure that they complete their vaccine schedule. The elderly population and persons with medical conditions that can contribute to the severity of the flu should also get the flu vaccine. MOHW encourages taking the COVID-19 booster or vaccination if you have not yet done so.

The following preventative measures should be in place to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and other respiratory viruses:

1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water
2. Sanitize hands regularly if not able to wash
3. Cough and sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands
4. Keep common surface areas (such as door knobs and countertops) clean and disinfected
5. If you are ill, limit contact with others as much as possible
6. Use a mask in enclosed places and social distance where needed
7. Avoid crowded places whenever possible
8. Visit your nearest health center if you are developing any flu-like symptoms. If symptoms continue or become more severe, visit your nearest health facility.

**Ends**

*A health and wellness message from your Ministry of Health and Wellness*