



MEDIA CONTACT:

Laurel Johnson, PIO

O: 231-347-5628

l.johnson@nwhealth.org

www.nwhealth.org

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Health Department of Northwest Michigan COVID-19 Update

Health department, school leaders discuss localized decision-making

Today, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, Chief Medical Executive and Chief Deputy for Health, announced recommendations for additional precautionary measures in response to increasing rates of COVID-19 infections. These recommendations include pausing youth sports and in-person instruction for high school students as well as refraining from indoor gatherings due to the increase in rates in COVID-19 infections in these groups.

In keeping with the strong relationships between local health departments and school leadership in northern Michigan, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan consulted with school superintendents across its region to review local data and conditions today. The health department will continue to support individual school districts in their decisions whether to continue in-person learning or virtual learning or to maintain or pause high school sports based on current available data pertaining to that school district.

In response to the state's announcement, school and local public health officials discussed not only the state recommendations but also the strong track record that northern school districts have in maintaining in-person instruction throughout the school year as well as individual school data pertaining to student COVID-19 rates. Also, important to consider is the current expanded eligibility and availability of the COVID-19 vaccination.

"We have supported our schools in their efforts to safely maintain important opportunities for students to learn in person throughout this school year. Rather than recommending a widespread pause to in-person education, we will continue supporting the individual school systems to make decisions regarding whether in-person vs. remote education is best and safest for their students and community," Peacock said.

These decisions are considered very carefully by examining local case numbers – including both community cases and cases within their school population as well as quarantine and isolation-related student absences - and the other pandemic risk indicators such as public health and hospital capacity.

"We know that in-person learning supports the mental health and overall well-being of youth," Peacock said, adding that each school district has established a plan which outlines actions needed to protect students and teachers to mitigate and prevent the spread of the virus in school settings. "With these factors in mind, each school district is equipped to make the classroom one of the safest places a student can be and we will continue to support them in making the best decision for their students, staff and the greater community," she said.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

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Peacock noted the situation is fluid and evolving and that the health department and school leaders will continue to monitor data. She also pointed out the health department can exercise the authority to take further action, including requiring closures, and would take such action if needed for the health of the community.

In addition to the required testing of the participants of youth and school sports, the health department is strongly recommending coaches and parents/guardians follow risk mitigation measures when engaging in spring sports activities. Among others, the recommendations include:

- All participants should take temperatures independently (at home) before attending sport activities.
- Participants should stay home if they are sick.
- Participants with known COVID-19 exposure, or participants experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, are not to participate and should be instructed to contact their healthcare provider(s) as soon as possible.
- All players, team officials, referees and spectators must wear facial coverings at all times upon arrival to, departure from and during sports activities.
- Participants should maintain proper hygiene habits: avoid touching eyes/nose/mouth, cover coughs and sneezes, and wash and sanitize hands often.
- Players and families should refrain from carpooling to training sessions, games and tournaments with those outside of the family household.

“We all have the same goal,” Peacock said, referring to the health department and schools, “and that is to keep our students safe and healthy both physically and mentally. By reviewing our data on a daily basis, keeping up with mitigation measures, and being flexible should things change, we can support our students learning in school and keep our communities safe. The other key factor in this is to get vaccinated and to do so immediately.”

The health department continues to offer COVID-19 vaccination clinics throughout Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties. To learn more and to sign up for your vaccine appointment, visit www.nwhealth.org.

Today, April 9, 124 new cases were reported: Antrim (24), Charlevoix (25), Emmet (25), and Otsego (50) counties. Today we are also reporting 1 new COVID-19 associated death in Charlevoix county. As of 4 p.m. today, the health department is reporting:

- Total COVID-19 cases in the following counties: Antrim (1,344), Charlevoix (1,321), Emmet (1,917), and Otsego (1,894).
- Recovered COVID-19 cases in the following counties: Antrim (988), Charlevoix (1,046), Emmet (1,473), and Otsego (1,204).
- Confirmed COVID-19 associated deaths in the following counties: Antrim (21), Charlevoix (14), Emmet (39), and Otsego (28).

The State of Michigan is reporting 731,131 cases and 16,426 deaths.

Stay up to date on the latest information in the Health Department of Northwest Michigan jurisdiction by [liking and following our Facebook page](#) and visiting our [COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#). To locate a testing facility, visit the [Michigan COVID-19 Test Finder website](#). To track the risk levels of COVID-19 pandemic indicators, visit the [MI Safe Start Map website](#). For more information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, visit the MDHHS [vaccine website](#) or the [CDC vaccine website](#).