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**Health Department of Northwest Michigan COVID-19 Update**

**Health Department issues order requiring masks in grades K-12**  
***Safety of children, staff and in-person learning are goals***

On Friday, Aug. 27, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan issued a [Public Health Order](#) requiring universal masking in grades K-12 for all school districts within the department's four county jurisdiction of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties. The order requires all persons, regardless of vaccination status – students, staff and visitors – to properly and consistently wear a face mask while inside any enclosed building or structure of the institution.

The order remains in effect until Health Department officials determine that risk trends have consistently improved, using such indicators as transmission level, vaccination coverage, hospital capacity, and public health capacity. This order is issued pursuant to the Michigan Public Health Code, MCL 333.2451 and 333.2453, as well as R. 325.175(4), which is an administrative rule promulgated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services pursuant to MCL 333.2226(d).

"Local public health departments have a duty to protect the public's health," said Lisa Peacock, Health Officer. "After thoughtful consideration, we took this action due to several key factors, with the number one goal of helping schools maintain in-person learning in a safe and healthy environment," she said.

Between August 3-27, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan reported 536 total cases of COVID-19 and 9 deaths – an increase of 425% compared to 102 cases in July. The Delta variant, the most common strain of COVID-19 in Michigan, is highly transmissible and the risk of transmission remains elevated among unvaccinated persons in schools.

In addition to the large increase in the number of cases, local hospital authorities are reporting a sharp uptick in COVID-19 cases, resulting in a strain on capacity including limited ICU beds, extremely long wait times in emergency departments, and lacking capacity to fully serve ALL patients, sometimes necessitating ambulance transport of patients to downstate hospitals which further strains local EMS capacity.

"The most effective way to prevent transmission in schools is to support being vaccinated," said Dr. Josh Meyerson, Medical Director. "Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students, as well as teachers, staff, and household members, is the most critical strategy to help schools stay open safely. Students younger than 12 years of age are currently ineligible to receive the vaccination. Masking, along with other mitigation measures, can prevent a significant number of new infections

*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](http://nwhealth.org).*

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among students, secondary cases in their households, and reduce the number of missed days of school due to illness, isolation, or quarantine,” Dr. Meyerson said.

In addition to personal protection from others, a face mask captures the mask wearer's exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols that may contain the virus from being breathed in by others. Given that the virus can spread from infected people who do not appear sick, masks remain essential to everyone. In addition to masks and vaccination, a layered protection strategy helps ensure a healthy learning environment, allowing students the best chance to remain healthy and physically present in the classroom setting.

This order is consistent with the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians for indoor face masks for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Health department officials also support the CDC and MDHHS recommendations that everyone – fully vaccinated and unvaccinated – wear a mask indoors in public if in an area of substantial or high community transmission. The order is also consistent with and assists schools in complying with their statutory obligation to provide for the safety and welfare of pupils while at school or a school sponsored activity or while enroute to or from school or a school-sponsored activity.

The health department is offering free COVID-19 testing with the support of HONU lab. The test is free, and no doctor’s order is required. Pre-registration is not required, but it is recommended to reduce time spent at the testing clinic, and walk-ins are welcome. Testing is available:

- Tuesday, September 7 from 1 - 6 pm at the East Jordan Fire Department (555 Maple St). To register visit: [www.honumg.info/EastJordan](http://www.honumg.info/EastJordan)
- Saturday, September 11 from 10 am – 4 pm at the Boyne City Fire Department (319 Lake St). To register visit: [www.honumg.info/BoyneFire](http://www.honumg.info/BoyneFire)

The health department offers convenient COVID-19 vaccination clinics for all area residents and visitors 12 and older either by appointment ahead of time or simply walking in. Parent consent is required for minors. Anyone may call 800-432-4121 if they have questions or are not able to find a time or date that works for them and/or their child. Clinics offer client choice of Pfizer, Moderna or J&J unless otherwise noted. Upcoming clinics for walk-ins or appointments include:

**Wednesday, September 1**

- 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 3434 M-119, Harbor Springs. Vaccine: Pfizer and J&J. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

**Thursday, September 2**

- 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 220 W Garfield Ave., Charlevoix. Vaccine: Pfizer and J&J. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)
- 8:30-11:30 a.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 95 Livingston Blvd., Gaylord. Vaccine: Pfizer and J&J. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

**Friday, September 3**

- 8:15-11:30 a.m. and 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 95 Livingston Blvd., Gaylord. Vaccine: Pfizer and J&J. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

The calendar on the website [www.nwhealth.org](http://www.nwhealth.org) lists clinics currently scheduled through September 29.

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](#).