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January 20, 2022

Health Department of Northwest Michigan COVID-19 Update

**Health Department shifting case investigation procedures,
with focus on patient education and treatment for COVID positive residents**

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan has begun shifting away from universal contact tracing and case investigations to focus on high-priority community groups at risk for outbreak and severe disease and those in congregate settings. This move follows guidance from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services which updated these guidelines statewide. When community transmission is as widespread as it is currently, certain public health measures such as individual case investigation and contact tracing lose some of their effectiveness.

"Across the state, as the pandemic evolves, health departments are shifting their focus to provide tools for the public to use to protect themselves," said Lisa Peacock, Health Officer with the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. "With other partners, we are collectively working to maximize early access to testing, including the availability of home tests, and providing instructions for people to take into their own hands isolation and contact tracing guidelines," she said.

Although health department staff will no longer be following up with every individual who tests positive for COVID-19, staff will continue to provide direct education, resources and support. If a provider/pharmacy/medical professional tests a person then they are still required to report it as usual and those results are entered into a statewide database. Some settings are unique, such as long-term care facilities and schools and therefore have specific guidelines they need to follow. Local health department staff continue to support these facilities in their efforts to protect their population.

Although the general public no longer needs to report a positive at-home COVID-19 test to the health department, they are welcome to contact the health department at 800-386-5959 with questions about their symptoms, and [isolation or quarantine guidelines](#). [Visit MDHHS](#) for information on what to do next if you have been exposed to COVID-19 as it is important to immediately take steps to get the care you need and avoid giving COVID-19 to people around you, health officials stress.

Health Department officials remind residents of four key points amid case increases and the Omicron variant being detected in all four counties within the jurisdiction:

1. Stay home if sick and experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
2. Get tested if symptomatic or once 5 days have passed after exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19 and stay home until your results are received. Testing locations in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego County can be found [here](#). Additional testing dates and times have been established in Emmet County at the Health Department's new mobile lab.

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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- a. Under a new Michigan rule, private insurers will be required to cover up to eight FDA-approved over-the-counter COVID-19 tests per month for each person covered by a health plan. For information on how to get your at-home over-the-counter COVID-19 test for free, visit <https://www.cms.gov/how-to-get-your-at-home-OTC-COVID-19-test-for-free>.
 - b. At the federal level, citizens can request free rapid coronavirus tests from the federal government. The website to process the requests is covidtests.gov.
3. Wear a mask when out in public settings correctly and consistently, whether fully vaccinated or unvaccinated, as an extra layer of protection. See the CDC's guide on masks [here](#).
4. Get vaccinated and boosted. Safe and effective vaccinations are offered at a number of local pharmacies and at health department clinics. See a list of locations in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego County [here](#) or visit the health department calendar of clinics for [5-11 year olds](#), and [12 and older](#) to self-schedule an appointment.
 - a. Wondering if you are eligible to receive a booster? See the U.S. FDA graphic illustrating booster eligibility [here](#).

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](#).