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**Health Department of Northwest Michigan**

**Mental Health Awareness Month takes on new  
importance in wake of COVID-19 pandemic**

COVID-19 over the past year has highlighted the critical role mental health plays in our overall wellbeing and Health Department of Northwest Michigan staff urge parents and teachers to be aware of additional pressures on students due to the pandemic. May is [Mental Health Awareness Month](#), which promotes mental health education and support in hopes of decreasing the stigma often associated with seeking help for mental illness.

Across the U.S., reports of increased stress-related conditions are high as individuals face the strains of the COVID-19 crisis. The additional stress, due to COVID-19 related issues, is being seen by health department staff who work with students and families through 12 schools in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties – Alanson, Beaver Island, Boyne City, Boyne Falls, Central Lake, Charlevoix, East Jordan, Ellsworth, Gaylord, Harbor Springs, Mancelona and Pellston.

“We are seeing an unprecedented number of referrals this year for students returning to school after quarantine who are experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety and depression,” said Amanda Rothfuss, LMSW and Community Health Supervisor.

Health officials said they understand the importance and necessity of quarantine for the health of students (and others) who are exposed to the virus. Yet, the isolation some students experience during quarantine may impact their overall emotional health.

Parents or teachers who recognize a change in behavior or are concerned about their student’s mental health should contact the mental health provider in their school-based program.

The health department’s mental health staff work closely with schools, families, and students to provide support and counseling for students. Through both individual and group counseling opportunities, mental health professionals provide biopsychosocial assessments, assist in the development of treatment plans and provide risk assessments to students in schools grades K-12 experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues. For more information about the health department’s school-based mental health services, visit <http://www.nwhealth.org/mhwp.html>. Anyone seeking mental health help should call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

*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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