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Health Department of Northwest Michigan COVID-19 Update

Public Health Order requiring masks K-12 still in place

Despite the Board of Health's vote on Tuesday to rescind an order requiring masks be worn by students, staff and visitors in all K-12 buildings, the [Public Health Order](#) by the Health Department of Northwest Michigan still stands.

"When issuing the order on August 27, there was one goal – to protect the health of children, school staff, and our community. And that hasn't changed," said Health Officer Lisa Peacock.

The order stands as originally issued requiring all schools within Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties to implement mandatory mask wearing for all students, staff and visitors in all school buildings. The order follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation for K-12 universal mask wearing.

The general upward trend of all pandemic risk indicators and the experience of schools in other areas in the state and country that had already started as well as increased strain on the local healthcare systems changed the risk level and the need to establish a consistent, proven, protective measure. "For this reason, we made the decision to implement a Public Health Order which requires schools to implement policies requiring universal masking indoors for all adults and students in K-12 schools," both Peacock and Medical Director Dr. Joshua Meyerson noted when releasing the order last week.

The health department hopes to impact three very simple yet extremely important objectives through this Order:

1. Keep children healthy and physically present for in-person learning in the safest environment as possible this school year. Sick or quarantined children miss out on school.
2. Reduce transmission of COVID-19 in learning environments given the more contagious Delta variant is circulating at a time when vaccination rates in students continues to be low and many younger students have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated.
3. Protect the healthcare system and public health system capacity to care for patients and contain transmission of COVID-19.

Local public health departments have a duty to protect the public's health. In fact, MCL 333.2433 (1) states: "A local health department shall continually and diligently endeavor to prevent disease, prolong life, and promote the public health through organized programs, including prevention and control of environmental health hazards; prevention and control of diseases; prevention and control of health problems of particularly vulnerable population groups..."

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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“We are using effective tools to keep our communities and our children safe,” said Dr. Joshua Meyerson, Medical Director of the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. The health department has worked in partnership with school leaders over the past 18 months to protect students, staff and the general public. Layered prevention strategies like vaccination, masking, distancing, and effective cleaning are proven ways to help control the spread of the virus and many schools have welcomed the advice and support.

Several elements of the COVID-19 pandemic have evolved over the past few weeks, which increases the risk to the health of the community. Local hospitals have reported a sharp uptick in COVID-19 cases as well as a dangerous strain on ICU capacity and significant staffing shortages.

Getting vaccinated is the number one priority to limit the spread of COVID-19. 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:

Thursday, September 9

- 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. - North Central Michigan College, 1515 Howard St., Petoskey. Call 800-432-4121 to schedule an appointment.

Friday, September 10

- 8:15-11:30 a.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 220 W Garfield Ave., Charlevoix. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)
- 8:15-11:35 a.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 95 Livingston Blvd., Gaylord. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

Monday, September 13

- 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 205 Grove St., Mancelona. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

Wednesday, September 15

- 8:15-11:30 a.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 3434 M-119, Harbor Springs. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)
- 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 220 W Garfield Ave., Charlevoix. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

Friday, September 17

- 1-4:30 p.m. - Health Department of Northwest Michigan, 95 Livingston Blvd., Gaylord. To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

The calendar on the website www.nwhealth.org lists clinics currently scheduled through September 30.

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](#).