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

### **MDHHS updates mask guidance for public settings, including schools *Change due to fewer COVID cases, less pressure on health care systems***

As COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to decline in the state, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is [updating its mask guidance for public settings](#), including school settings, to reflect that Michigan is entering a post-surge, recovery phase.

This statewide shift comes on the heels of the Health Department of Northwest Michigan lifting its [First Amended Order](#) which required masks to be worn in school settings. The school-based mask mandate for school districts in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties ends at 11:59 p.m., today, Thursday, February 17, 2022.

In their updated guidance, MDHHS described the COVID-19 cycle moving forward, as broken down into three key phases:

- **Response** – Local and state public health implement rapid response to a surge. The public may be advised to increase masking, testing and social distancing.
- **Recovery** – Post-surge. No immediate resurgence predicted. Local and state public health will monitor conditions that could lead to future surges.
- **Readiness** – A surge in cases is expected, with implications on severity of illness and hospital capacity. Increased communication to the public regarding possible new risks.

Currently, decreases in cases and hospitalizations and increased access to vaccines, testing and treatment and widespread availability of respirator masks that can better protect the wearer, indicate that Michigan is entering a post-surge, recovery phase of the cycle.

During this phase, MDHHS recommends that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, continue to practice universal masking in high-risk congregate settings including long-term care facilities, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, jails and health care facilities. All individuals, regardless of vaccination status, should also wear a mask during [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) periods to stop further community spread of COVID-19.

“This is welcome news to see this progress and lessening of mask requirements,” said Lisa Peacock, Health Officer for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. “At the same time, we are very supportive of many families and community members who wish to continue to protect themselves and their loved ones by wearing a mask. As a society, we need to support their choice and know it may be necessitated due to a compromised person in their household, or the desire to protect a grandparent or a child under the age of five who is not able to be vaccinated.”

*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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Why is this a safer time? Peacock noted several reasons:

- Sustained decreasing risk trends for the first time since the school year started including fewer COVID-19 positive cases and hospitalizations, and increased capacity by health systems to treat patients.
- More tools available including vaccinations, enhanced testing capacity, early treatment therapeutics for the most vulnerable, and widespread access to KN95 masks so people can better protect themselves.
- Evolving body of knowledge about the virus – including modeling for the Omicron variant, which has been very accurate – helps us prepare and plan for future surges.

Peacock stressed that schools and organizations may need to “dial up and dial down” mitigation measures for times when it is most useful and necessary and stated “We support the plans our schools have put into place to protect their staff and students – we have worked very closely with them throughout the past two years and understand they may vary as they work to make their school environments as safe as possible.”

Today’s announcement by MDHHS follows Governor Whitmer’s signing of the bipartisan \$1.2 billion supplemental funding bill, which includes \$150.8 million for testing and screenings in schools so kids can continue safely learning in-person.

Health officials continue to recommend the use of layered mitigation strategies:

- **Get vaccinated against COVID-19.** If eligible, individuals can schedule their vaccination or booster dose through the health department by [clicking here](#).
- After testing positive for COVID-19, individuals are encouraged to talk to their health care provider about whether they meet eligibility criteria and should get antibody or antiviral treatment to help with their recovery. Learn more about [COVID-19 Therapeutics](#).
- **Isolation and Quarantine.** Staying away from others when you are sick or were recently exposed to COVID-19 are important tools to prevent further spread of the virus. Learn more about [what happens when you have or are exposed to COVID-19](#)
- **Get tested if you are exposed or have symptoms.** Anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested regardless of vaccination status or prior infection. If you get tested because you have symptoms or were potentially exposed to the virus, you should stay away from others while you wait for your test result. Testing before unmasked gatherings provides an additional layer of protection. To schedule a COVID-19 test with the health department, [click here](#).
- **Take additional steps to protect yourself and others.** For additional guidance on mitigation strategies see [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#).
- **Get a free mask.** Free KN95 masks are being distributed by community organizations, including local MDHHS offices, health departments and Area Agency on Aging offices. Residents who want masks can obtain masks from partner agencies across the state.

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](#).

CUTLINE:

This infographic explains the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 three-phase cycle of Response, Recovery and Readiness.

