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**Health Department of Northwest Michigan**

### **Be Safe During Holiday Outings**

*Personal Protocols Can Help Prevent Respiratory Illnesses*

One way to anticipate an uptick in COVID-19 is to track the virus through wastewater. The Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) is part of a statewide SARS-CoV-2 surveillance initiative comprised of local health departments, academic institutions, tribal communities, and wastewater facilities. The approach can act as an early indicator to positive cases, provide valuable insight into COVID-19 mitigation efforts, and supplement other surveillance methods.

Samples taken Dec. 14 at the City of Gaylord wastewater treatment plant show a spike in SARS-CoV-2 gene copies, an indication of increasing viral shedding by people using that facility's system. Spikes in samples like this are usually followed by an increase in positive COVID-19 cases in that population.

"The Northern Michigan Regional Lab in Gaylord processes the samples we receive from partners from throughout northern Michigan," said Daniel R. Thorell, HDNW Health Officer. "We are sharing these results to verify reports of the increasing cases of influenza and COVID in the region."

While the lab only tests for COVID-19, these results support what HDNW and other healthcare professionals have been advising since fall—anticipated and observed increases in COVID-19, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and influenza. The media has dubbed the situation the "triple threat" or "trifecta" of respiratory viruses.

"When we see indicators like this, we encourage people to consider different ways to reduce their risk of becoming infected and transmitting the virus to others. Getting vaccinated with the new bivalent booster, staying home when sick, masking while in crowded indoor settings, handwashing, and using social distancing can all help," said Joshua Meyerson, HDNW Medical Director. "While we all want to enjoy our holiday gatherings, there are ways we can do so that bring little inconvenience or disruption. In the long run, remaining healthy is what makes our holiday events the most enjoyable."

To see a line graph of the findings in Gaylord, visit the HDNW COVID Wastewater Dashboard [here](#). When at the dashboard, set the 'Site List' to Gaylord WWTP for data from that location.

If you would like to set up COVID-19 testing for your friends or family, please call 800-432-4121 or schedule [online](#). The HDNW mobile clinic will be testing at Home Depot in Gaylord from 8:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 27 and at Office Max in Petoskey from 8:15-12:15 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 28.

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*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).*