



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Berrien County Organizations Provide COVID-19 Response Updates

(Berrien County, Michigan) - Berrien County officials are clearing up confusion regarding some of the more recent Executive Orders in Michigan. Residents are reminded that in accordance with the current "Stay Home, Stay Safe" Executive Order, all Michigan Secretary of State (SOS) offices are temporarily closed. This has caused several questions regarding the renewal of driver's licenses and vehicle registrations that have been directed to law enforcement. While the SOS offices are closed, many transactions can still be completed online. Law enforcement encourages individuals to visit the [Secretary of State's Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more up to date information. In Governor Whitmer's [Executive Order 2020-78](#), she temporarily extends the expiration of state identification cards, driver's licenses and operator endorsements, as well as suspends penalties for vehicle registration violations and protects Michigan drivers. The order also ensures that automobile insurance will continue to protect and cover Michigan drivers. The order protects Michiganders from penalties for driving on what would otherwise be expired driver's licenses, learner's permits and commercial driver's licenses, and vehicle registrations. These protections do not apply to motorists with suspended or revoked driver's licenses.

With the Governor extending the Stay Home order until May 28th, the current restrictions on in-person services at the Berrien County Courthouse are continued. Additionally, the Michigan Supreme Court in conjunction with the State Court Administrative Office have directed all state courts to re-open in a four phase approach. Berrien County Chief Judge Mabel Mayfield stated, "We have maintained regular communication with the Berrien County Health Department and the State Court Administrators Office. Consistent with direction from the Michigan Supreme Court we have conducted virtual court proceedings wherever possible. We are hopeful within a few days to share specifics regarding our Phase One approach to "Return to Full Capacity" response to COVID-19 for Michigan's Judiciary."

[Executive Order 2020-54](#) continues to allow tenants and mobile home owners to remain in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic even if they are unable to stay current on their rent. This order prohibits the entering of a premises for the purpose of evicting a resident, and prohibits a landlord from demanding possession of premises for nonpayment. It also authorizes the Michigan Supreme Court to stay eviction-related proceedings until after the COVID-19 emergency has passed. In Berrien County, we are fortunate to have non-profit agencies working together to help out during these difficult times. Anna Murphy, President/CEO of United Way of Southwest Michigan stated, "The partnership of United Way of Southwest Michigan and Berrien Community Foundation, that is managing the Southwest Michigan Cares Fund, is focusing on two phases - emergency response and long-term recovery. Disbursements in the first and current phase have been made to nonprofits in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties for food, cleaning, and hygiene supplies, baby items, and Personal Protection Equipment. Once the tri-county area enters into the second long-term recovery phase, the fund will begin making disbursements to nonprofit organizations for rent/mortgage and utilities assistance. We are thankful that our community has supported this fund to be able to address these critical needs. Individuals in need please call 2-1-1, organizations may apply at www.Southwestmichigancaresfund.org."

The Berrien County Health Department continues to report an increasing number of COVID-19 cases; with confirmed and presumed cases reported in every zip code, community transmission is widespread. To date, there has been 484 confirmed cases and 28 deaths reported due to COVID-19. The Berrien County data dashboard showing daily case count updates, demographic information, and a map of Berrien County presumed and confirmed cases can be found at www.bchdmi.org/COVID19.

“Our community members have demonstrated their commitment to fighting this virus by contributing so much to slow the spread of COVID-19. We understand many people are eager to go places and gather with friends and family members, but we must stay focused on disease prevention methods to minimize the risk of further infection and ensure the health system capacity is not overburdened,” said Nicki Britten, health officer of the Berrien County Health Department. In order to continue the progress made in slowing the spread of the virus, the best things residents can do is wear a face covering when in enclosed public spaces, keep up with frequent hand washing, and limit close contact with members outside of your household. COVID-19 spreads person-to-person between people who are in close contact with one another through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. Even if you don’t have symptoms, you could still be a carrier of the virus.

Spectrum Health Lakeland continues to provide care for a multitude of health concerns and wants the community to know its hospitals and clinics are safely and effectively caring for all patients every day. To increase safety and limit unnecessary exposure to COVID-19, Lakeland has implemented several measures including enhanced cleaning, screening, and masking procedures, social distancing floor signage, isolation of symptomatic patients in specific areas of the facility, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

“We understand the reluctance some people might have to visit a hospital or clinic during this time,” said Loren B. Hamel, MD, president, Spectrum Health Lakeland. “I can assure you we are taking this very seriously and the safety of our friends and neighbors remains our number one priority. I would also caution that delaying necessary medical care, or not seeking treatment for serious conditions such as a heart attack or stroke, can be life threatening.”

Lakeland, in collaboration with Versiti Blood Centers, continues to treat COVID-19 patients with blood plasma from patients who have recovered from the disease, providing an additional treatment option to the most severely affected COVID-19 patients. To be considered as a donor, patients must have had a **positive COVID-19 test and be symptom free for at least 14-days. For more information on donating convalescent plasma, call 269.983.8261.**

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