



**BERRIEN COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**
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For Immediate Release

Contact: Gillian Conrad

(269) 927-5624

gconrad@bchdmi.org

Health Department Shifts Prioritization of COVID-19 Case Investigations

Residents urged to take personal action if they test positive for the virus or are close contacts to a case

(Berrien County, MI) -- With COVID-19 cases rapidly increasing across Berrien County and surrounding regions, the Berrien County Health Department is making shifts in case investigation and contact tracing processes to meet the increased demand and make the best use of existing resources. Because of the continuing increases in number of COVID-19 cases, there have been delays in the amount of time it takes to contact all persons who test positive for the virus as well as all those who have been in close contact to someone who has COVID-19. Residents are urged not to wait for the Health Department to call, but to take personal responsibility and action if someone becomes aware of a positive test result or potential exposure to COVID-19.

Over the last month, the 7-day rolling average of new COVID-19 cases has risen from approximately 19 new cases per day in the second week of October to now an average of 76 new cases per day. “With the significant increase in cases, it has become increasingly more difficult to rapidly contact everyone who has tested positive or who is considered a close contact of a positive case,” said Nicki Britten, health officer, Berrien County Health Department. “We are asking our community to help reduce transmission. If you test positive, take action immediately by isolating and notifying close contacts. If you have been exposed to someone with the virus, please quarantine at home away from others. Isolation and quarantine remain important public health tools for us to cut off the chain of viral transmission within our community.”

In order to maximize staffing resources and prevent outbreaks amongst vulnerable individuals, the Berrien County Health Department will begin prioritizing case investigation to notify those who are:

- Age 65 and older, especially those with chronic underlying conditions;
- Children who are 18 years old and younger, especially those attending school in-person;
- Individuals residing in congregate living environments, such as long-term care facilities;

All other individuals who test positive will be contacted as capacity allows. If you receive a positive COVID-19 test result, isolate for a minimum of 10 days from the start of your symptoms or your positive test date if you didn't have symptoms. Notify your close contacts that they may have been exposed to you

48 hours prior to when symptoms started and encourage them to quarantine and consider getting tested. If someone is awaiting test results, they must stay home until the results are in.

A close contact is someone who has been within six feet (about two arms' length) of an infected person for at least 15 minutes in 24 hours including brief encounters (it does not need to be consecutive minutes) with or without a face covering. Close contacts should quarantine—generally 14 days from the last exposure—since a person can be infectious up to 48 hours before showing any symptoms. Isolation and quarantine mean staying home from work, school, social gatherings, extracurricular activities and any other public place other than when seeking medical care.

The Health Department will continue to conduct case investigation and contact tracing in nursing homes, schools, priority clusters identified in high-risk congregate settings and assist businesses with COVID-19 related issues and positive employees.

More information about isolation, quarantine, testing for COVID-19 and more can be found at www.bchdmi.org.

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