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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

Issued November 23, 2020

The Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is issuing the following advisory to protect the health of the public in Benzie and Leelanau counties.

On November 15th, 2020, the Director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services signed Emergency Order Under MCL 333.2253 – Gatherings and Face Mask Order to contain the spread of COVID-19, as Michigan continues to see a surge in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. The [new emergency order](#) enacts a three-week pause targeting indoor social gatherings and other group activities in an effort to curb rapidly rising COVID-19 infection rates.

Locally, we have experienced a **near 6-fold increase in cases** over the past 2 months. Our hospital systems are reporting they are reaching critical capacity limits for both beds and staffing. The deaths and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 in our region have reached the highest they have ever been and the COVID-19 risk level for all our counties is now considered **highest risk**, signifying widespread community transmission.

Therefore, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is issuing this Public Health Advisory to provide heightened guidance for our residents to best protect themselves and others. **This Public Health Advisory will remain in effect until lifted and will replace all previously issued Public Health Advisories.** The cooperation of all businesses and residents in following best practices and safety precautions is needed to prevent an unmanageable surge on our local healthcare systems, to protect the health and safety of citizens, as well as to prevent additional restrictions and closures. The Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department continues to urge everyone to wear a facial covering in public places, practice social distancing, and exercise good hand hygiene and to comply with the public health orders issued by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

Increased gathering with others, travel, and movement in and about local business establishments during the upcoming holiday celebrations presents additional risk to our hospitals, business, and community members. It is easy to 'let our guard down' in what has always been deemed our safe places, our homes and those of our good friends and relatives. Unfortunately, viral transmission is most common, and infection rates are increased, with prolonged exposure times indoors especially when in close proximity to others, which describes typical gatherings with family and close friends.

In order to protect our residents, visitors, and employees, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is advising that you abide by the following guidelines:

1. **If you are sick, stay at home.** Do not leave your residence and do not go to work.
2. **If you have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 seek testing as soon as possible and** isolate at home until your test results come back. Contact your healthcare provider or local health department for assistance.
3. **If you test positive for COVID-19 immediately isolate yourself** and notify your close contacts to quarantine. Do not wait for instruction from the Health Department as there may be delays due to rapidly rising cases. See guidance: [if you test positive for COVID-19](#)
4. If you are a **close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 self-quarantine for 14 days** from your last contact with them.
5. Residents are urged to **answer all calls, texts, or emails from the State or Local Health Department.**

6. All residents and visitors should **adhere to the required safety precautions** while in business establishments including face coverings, social distancing, and capacity limits posted at business entrances.
7. **Maintain 6-feet of social distance** with those outside your household, and avoid crowding on outdoor trails, parks, and recreational areas.
8. **Comply with limits for social gatherings and events.** See [MDHHS social gathering limitations](#).
9. **Choose a consistent “social bubble” or “social pod”** and be comfortable with that group knowing that as the number increases so does risk of transmission. Keep your number under 10 and no more than one other household.
10. **Consider modified holiday celebrations that are small, local, and encourage wearing of masks, social distancing, and proper hygiene practices** to help slow the spread of the virus. Stay within your small [“social pod”](#) and instead of larger indoor gatherings around a meal consider alternative activities such as meeting outdoors for walks or shorter visits where everyone can mask and maintain distance.
11. **If you choose to travel to visit with friends or relatives keep the number low.** Consider being very careful in the week or two before travel, and practice increased caution during the visit. Upon returning home for the week or two after travel you should monitor closely for any symptoms and stay home if you become sick. Consider getting tested 5-7 days after travel or visiting and isolating until the results are back. This goes for those travelling and those who are having visitors, especially if anyone in these groups is higher risk.
12. If you must travel via **public transportation** protect yourself and others by wearing a mask, keeping as much distance from others as possible, and regularly washing or sanitizing your hands. Keep your hands away from your face as much as possible.

While indoor spaces present increased risk for coronavirus transmission, schools and businesses currently allowed to remain open should strictly adhere to state and local guidance to maintain lower risk environments. Customers are encouraged to continue to support local businesses but are advised to opt for pickup and delivery whenever possible. Time spent shopping or otherwise inside indoor public spaces should be minimized. Schools are encouraged to continue following their school board approved COVID-19 preparedness and response plans, in addition to utilizing [state](#) and local guidance as needed.

All residents and businesses are urged to follow all these safety precautions. Failure to do so will perpetuate the spread of COVID-19 and cause prolonged harm to people and businesses. By following these simple guidelines, the risk for spreading COVID-19 lowers significantly, protecting everyone who lives, works, and plays in beautiful northern Michigan.

Benzie and Leelanau County residents who need resources can call 211 or utilize the Health Department’s free Community Connections program by calling 1-833-674-2159.



Health Officer

11/23/2020

Date