

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Bioterrorism Preparedness

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Communicable Disease

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Resource Recovery

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Dear families of Allegan County—

The year of 2020 will be quite the chapter for the history books. Many of our daily routines have had to be challenged and adjusted to the new uncertainty of our world. We recognize that this has not been easy on many of us. Unfortunately, we have to be prepared for the reality that the beginning of 2021 will likely present us with the same challenges.

As we planned for the 2020-2021 school year, our biggest concern was delivering quality education while supporting the health, safety, and well-being of students, staff, and their families. Most of our schools opted to do a combination of in-person and remote instruction to keep students in school but also safe. **Our ultimate goal is for students to have a level of in-person instruction so that schools can continue to provide all the services that Allegan County children need to be successful.** We believe in the value of in-person instruction and related activities for educating the whole child.

In this letter, we explain:

- Where we are seeing school-age cases and quarantined individuals
- What the data shows
- The need to work together for our children and our local economy
- What can happen if cases continue to rise

Where we are seeing cases and quarantined individuals:

The majority of individuals associated with our schools that are currently in isolation or quarantine did not have an exposure to COVID-19 at school. Rather, these exposures happened outside of the school setting activities. These activities have included:

1. Car-pooling
2. Sleepovers
3. Contact sports, such as football and volleyball
4. Other social type gatherings.

School-Related Outbreaks:

In the first two months of the school year, there have been two outbreaks associated with Allegan County schools. The partnerships between the schools, Allegan County Health Department, and families have allowed us to quickly identify cases to isolate and quarantine the exposed. We continue to rely on cooperation from families in reporting positive cases and identifying close contacts.

What the data shows:

- The better we are with our mitigation strategies, the longer we will be able to keep schools open and have children attend school in-person.
- When social distancing is practiced, less students and staff have to quarantine if there was a positive case in the building or classroom.
- Masks have shown to work at slowing disease spread by about 70% (Sources: [Howard, J., Huang, A. et al. 2020](#); [Wang, Y., Tian, H., et al. 2020](#); [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#); [Davies, A., Thompson, K. et al. 2013](#))
- The Allegan County Health Department has reported a significant increase in positive cases across our county—mirroring the increase of positive cases across the state and region in recent weeks (see [Allegan County Health Department COVID-19 Dashboard](#) and [MI Start Map Dashboard](#)).
 - The increase in cases suggests that the mitigation strategies and diligence to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have not been consistently practiced within our community at large.

We need to work together to keep schools open—for the kids and the economy

- The goal to sustain the optimal learning environment of in-person instruction as long as possible is in danger as the community-based spread of COVID-19 continues to grow.
- Schools play a vital role in our communities, and we have seen that having the in-person option this school year has provided a significant benefit for the academic, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our students and families.
- Having schools open and operational also allows for parents and caregivers to keep attending work, thus, sustaining our local economy.

Keeping schools open for in-person learning is dependent on two actions:

1. Mitigating the spread of COVID-19 within the walls of our school buildings
2. Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our community as a whole

If the rate of cases continues to trend upward, the Allegan County Health Department warns that schools may be forced to implement additional protocols and restrictions to prevent the current rate of spread. These safety measures could mean the cancellation of extracurricular activities, including band and athletics, further limiting access to events and, in a worst-case scenario, forcing a shift to fully remote learning across our districts.

It is essential that we all work together to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our communities with the same determination that has allowed us to successfully open our schools this fall. **We all must follow the necessary protocols when out in public or around others outside of your household that have worked to provide a safe environment in our schools: wear a mask, watch your distance, and wash your hands.** Continue to screen your students for the onset of symptoms before the start of each day, and keep them home if they are sick.

Our school families, community members, and you are important to us as we support health and safety precautions both within and outside of school. Thank you for your continuous support, flexibility, and demonstrated resilience during this unprecedented school year.

In partnership,



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Allegan County Health Department



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Allegan Area Education Service Agency



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