



LAPEER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
1800 Imlay City Road  
Lapeer, MI 48446

Date: March 11, 2020

### **Letter for Lapeer County Re: Novel Coronavirus**

Public health organizations around the world are working to contain an outbreak of COVID-19, a respiratory disease caused by a new virus (Novel Coronavirus) that has now been detected in more than 100 countries.

Because it is new, it presents a significant challenge to public health across the globe. Unlike the flu, there is no vaccine, natural immunity or specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19.

At present, there are no confirmed cases in Lapeer County. However, the State of Michigan has two confirmed cases of COVID-19, one in Oakland County and another in Wayne County. In order to assist local governments in their response to the virus, Governor Gretchen Whitmer has declared a State of Emergency.

Local emergency operations staff have met and will continue to meet regarding implementation of an emergency response if it is warranted. A number of communications are scheduled to ensure the public is informed.

For school districts, and other public organizations in Lapeer County, the time is now to ensure we have every precaution in place in the event that the disease appears in our community. That is the purpose of this and any subsequent communication on this topic: *to keep our community safe.*

It is important to note that there is no evidence, to this point, that children are more susceptible to this virus than adults. People at higher risk of negative health outcomes, including death, are older adults as well as people with chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes and lung disease.

It is of vital importance that during this time of uncertainty, we make every effort to be proactive not only with preventative measures to impede the spread of the virus, but also with information sharing and adherence to official guidance.

### **Preventative Measures**

Local schools and other public organizations should undertake common sense measures in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Even though it is caused by a new and different virus than Influenza, many of the symptoms can be similar, however, the cough tends to be dry/non-productive. Additional symptoms include fever  $\geq 100.4$  F and shortness of breath. Many of the same precautions practiced during flu season also apply to COVID-19:

- *Avoid contact with people who are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throw it away (or use the crook of the elbow).*

- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces like door knobs and keyboards.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.*
- *Stay home when you are sick, except to receive medical care.*
- *Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content)*

People who are at higher risk of getting sick from COVID-19, as referenced above, should take even more proactive steps including avoidance of crowds, cruises and non-essential air travel.

As public school districts are charged with maintaining an environment that is safe for students and staff, districts can, in order to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, exclude students and staff from attendance until return requirements have been met. In addition, districts may also request students or staff traveling to any destination (domestic or international) on the CDC's travel advisory list (Level 3) to alert officials prior to departure.

School districts and other public institutions are required to follow existing guidelines and procedures for prevention and control of communicable diseases. This often requires thorough inspections and classroom sanitization protocols, student observation and isolation as well as reporting information to relevant public health agencies. These procedures should be in place and ready to be deployed as necessary. If COVID-19 were to emerge in Lapeer County, sanitization of schools and other public spaces should be done routinely.

Finally, school districts and other public organizations should develop a tentative plan in the event closures/cancellations are warranted. This includes a communication plan aimed at calming fears of students and parents while explaining the public health necessity of any preventative measure.

### **Information Sharing**

As stated above, accurate information during a time of uncertainty is imperative. False or misleading information can have the effect of minimizing serious public health risks, and sharing information from dubious sources can put vulnerable populations at greater risk. Now, perhaps more than ever, we need to be intentional about sharing sourced information that is reliable.

As community leaders, we must direct the attention of concerned community members to local, state and national public health agencies that are tracking the disease and issuing public guidance on prevention. As information is changing frequently, updates will be placed on the county website as available – [www.lapeercountyweb.org](http://www.lapeercountyweb.org)

### **What follows is a list of resources for information regarding COVID-19:**

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) ([coronavirus.gov](http://coronavirus.gov))
- Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center ([coronavirus.jhu.edu](http://coronavirus.jhu.edu))
- The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services ([michigan.gov/MDHHS](http://michigan.gov/MDHHS))
- The Lapeer County Health Department ([lapeercountyweb.org](http://lapeercountyweb.org))

Finally, it is important that we use our various platforms for communication to direct people to primary sources of information (including those above) as well as to send out frequent reminders regarding common sense preventative measures (also outlined above). As nearly half of all Americans, according to a recent PEW study, get their news from social media, it is our responsibility

to provide our community with accurate information. This is a situation that calls for reliance on information from experts in the field, not internet memes and social media scuttlebutt.

### **Public Health Guidance**

The Centers for Disease Control have offered guidance to local, state and national organizations, including educational institutions, on a range of issues aimed at prevention and mitigation of the spread of COVID-19.

CDC is encouraging collaboration and information-sharing between K-12 school districts and local health officials to ensure communities are prepared for COVID-19. They are encouraging review and implementation of Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs), information-sharing systems, environmental cleaning routines and procedures for absenteeism/in-school sickness. Guidance from the CDC for public and private organizations can be found at [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

### **Next Steps**

In the coming days and weeks, we must continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 and maintain close communication with state and local public health organizations — and each other. We must coordinate responses and share information as colleagues in order to ensure the lowest level of disruption in our community.

We recognize that many in our community are uneasy about this virus and how it could disrupt their lives. Because of this, we must make every effort to instill confidence that the health and well-being of our citizens is always paramount.