

COVID-19

7 cases total reported at Masonic Pathways

By Eric Baerren*ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com**Multimedia journalist*

For weeks, as cases of COVID-19 increased in surrounding counties, Gratiot remained a center of calm, just a handful of cases. Outbreaks at two elderly care facilities the last two and a half weeks, however, reversed that.

The latest is at Masonic Pathways, which was COVID-free until it announced two residents had tested positive on Saturday. On Tuesday, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department said that as of Monday, two staff and five residents tested positive.

As of Tuesday's latest update from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 49 confirmed cases were reported in Gratiot County. The disease has

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killed four of its residents.

At least 12 of those cases were residents of Riverside Healthcare Center, 1149 W. Monroe Road, in St. Louis. Another three members of the facility's staff, who might be counted in a different county of residence, tested positive.

There are four more Gratiot County care facilities — Ashley Care Center, Schnepf Nursing Home, The Laurels of Fulton and Warwick Living Center — that have reported no confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to state records.

Nursing homes have become a focal point of the fight against COVID-19. The emerging picture of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the disease, is that it thrives in confined living conditions. It is especially lethal towards people with compromised immune systems and people of advanced age, with half of Michigan's 5,017 deaths involving people older than 77.

Another focal point are the state's prisons. The Michigan Department of Corrections announced last week that it is testing all of its inmates. Previously, five inmates and two staff at Central Michigan Correctional Facility had tested positive. On Tuesday, the MDOC

announced that a third member of the prison's staff tested positive.

Of CMCF's 2,500 inmates, 101 tests have come back negative.

The department awaits the results of the remaining 2,394 tests.

Across the state, the trend is that the number of cases and deaths is waning while testing continues to increase. Both are considered positive metrics.

On Tuesday, another 435 cases were announced statewide for a total of 52,350.

The total number of deaths increased 102 to 5,017; however, 43 of those were based on a review of vital records.

MDHHS staff reviews vital statistics three times a week, comparing vital records listing COVID-19 as a contributing factor of death against laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a state disease database. If the death certificate is matched to a positive case that does not list the person as having died, the database is updated and local health department notified.

Five of those additional cases were in Midland County, bringing the county's total cases/deaths to 76/8, and one additional case was confirmed in Montcalm County, with a total of 56/1. Isabella remained at 62/7, Clare remained at 15/2, Mecosta remained at 18/2, Gladwin is at 17/1.

Daily News

Thursday, May 21, 2020

An ACE employee



Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) accounting clerk Tracey Larabel, pictured with Health Officer Marcus Cheatham, received the ACE (Achievement, Character, Excellence) Award for outstanding performance earlier this year. ACE Award recipients are chosen by their co-workers and have shown to demonstrate achievement, character and excellence in all they do at MMDHD. Larabel received numerous nominations. She is said to be an exemplary employee and a great asset to the team. She has made tremendous improvements to the health department's billing processes and goes above and beyond to do her job to the best of her ability. She is described as being kind, a pleasure to work and someone who always has a smile on her face. The MMDHD congratulates Larabel for winning the ACE Award and thanks her for her dedicated service to public health. — Submitted photo

ST. LOUIS

Cleanup work carries on at contaminated Velsicol site

By Greg Nelson*gnelson@medianewsgroup.com*

Despite the shutdown of many businesses and industries over the past several weeks cleanup activities at the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site in St. Louis have continued uninterrupted.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency contractors Jacobs Engineering and Cascade Environmental are still providing remediation services at the 52-acre parcel.

“As we continue to adjust to the evolving COVID-19 situation, EPA is taking the necessary steps to ensure that decisions about ongoing cleanup activities at Superfund sites are made with the health and safety of communities, EPA staff and contractors as the priority,” EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Diane Russell said in a press release. “Therefore, decisions about continuing on-site activities will be made on a case-by-case basis.

“EPA Region 5 is working to

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Cleanup

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evaluate options for continuing site work or securing sites, especially in areas where local health declarations are in effect due to COVID-19. EPA contractors and subcontractors continue to remain on-site making sure the in-place thermal treatment system continues to operate.”

Work is now taking place on a three-acre parcel called Area 2, where remediation is being done in two phases.

Heating of the contaminated soil began in October and the temperature is currently 217 degrees Fahrenheit, past the 212-degree target, which was met on April 7, Russell said.

Heating will continue for at least 90 days.

Thus far about 35,000 pounds of contaminants have been treated and more are expected to be removed prior to shutdown, Russell said.

It's anticipated the first phase of heating in Area 2 will be completed this summer with the second phase starting next spring and be finished by December 2021.

The drilling of 448 bore holes for equipment and wells in Area 2 has been

completed.

Perimeter air monitoring shows all systems are operating as intended and that there is no risk to workers or the adjacent neighborhood, Russell said.

The estimated cost of treating all of Ares 2 is \$25 million, she added.

The smaller one-acre Area 1 was completed last fall.

The EPA and Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy are also continuing to evaluate the slurry wall, a three-foot thick barrier that was installed around the entire plant site in an effort to contain pollutants on the property.

Groundwater level monitoring is also continuing both inside and outside the wall to help determine its performance, Russell said.

“This work will provide additional information on the design of the water treatment plant (that will be built later) and provide additional groundwater sampling and elevation data,” she explained.

In the late 1990s the EPA discovered that a portion of the slurry wall along the north side of the plant site had failed allowing contaminants to flow into the adjacent Pine River. That problem has since been rectified.

'County Lines Don't Stop a Virus'

 Posted on Wednesday, May 27th, 2020 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

GRATIOT SURPASSES MONTCALM IN CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Having gained over 20 cases in the past week, Gratiot County now has more cases than neighboring Montcalm. As of Tuesday, Gratiot County is reporting 71 cumulative positive cases of COVID-19 and six deaths, according to the state data, up 21 cases and 2 deaths from last week. A representative from the MidMichigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) was unable to confirm whether the two individuals who passed away this week were associated with the outbreaks at Masonic Pathways in Alma or Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis.

This week marks the first time Gratiot's positive count has surpasses that of larger neighbor Montcalm. That county gained nine cases over the past week, and is reporting a total of 65 cases. Montcalm continues to report only one death. And to the south, Clinton County gained only two cases last week for a total of 138 cumulative positive cases. Clinton County continues to report 10 deaths.

Having exceeded Montcalm County's positive cases, Gratiot's numbers are nearing those of Isabella and Midland Counties. Isabella gained 12 cases over the past week, and was reporting 74 cases as of Tuesday. Isabella continues to report seven deaths. And Midland gained three cases for a total of 79, and continues to report eight deaths.

Saginaw County's case count reached 1000 this week, having gained 60 over the past week. Their death toll reached 107 this week, with eight more individuals passing away this week.

Statewide, Michigan is reporting a total of 55,104 positive COVID-19 cases and 5,266 deaths as of Tuesday. Back in Gratiot County, a significant portion of the cases are tied to the two longterm care facility outbreaks. 30 cases are tied to Masonic Pathways in Alma, with 18 residents and 12 staff members testing positive. Vicky Johnson, chief marketing officer for the Michigan Masonic Home, said that the first round of testing for all residents and staff has been completed, and that "ongoing testing" will continue on at least a weekly basis as long as cases persist.

Warwick Living Center, Masonic's other Alma campus, remains COVID-free.

At Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis, updated numbers of COVID-19 cases were not available by press time. As of last week, a total of 19 residents and four staff had tested positive for the virus, and three residents had passed away. Facility Administrator Al Raza told The Herald that the outbreak at that facility has been contained as of Saturday of last week.

Elsewhere in St. Louis, the Central Michigan Correctional Facility is reporting one more inmate case of COVID-19 since last week, for a total of six inmate cases and three staff cases. All inmates were tested last week, and most came back negative. The St. Louis Correctional Facility across the street remains COVID-free.

The nine cases from the Central Michigan Correctional Facility are not included in Gratiot's total case count, and are instead reported separately with other Michigan Department of Corrections cases.

MidMichigan Medical Center – Gratiot continues to operate well within their resources, according to Marita Hattem-Schiffman, president of MidMichigan Health – Central Region. As non-essential and elective medical procedures are now allowed to resume under a recent executive order of the governor, she said that the facilities are beginning to welcome more patients, including those who had put off seeking necessary care to avoid the hospital during the pandemic.

"We have had a steady increase of patients over the past few weeks, many of whom delayed needed care but who can wait no longer," she said. "We are relieved to see them and encourage anyone who has put off care, even preventative care, to resume their usual practices and get the care they need and deserve."

As stay-at-home restrictions ease, Hattem-Schiffman said that the community needs to continue to take precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19. Neglecting handwashing, masking and social distancing practices could easily lead to an increase of cases in the area.

"I'd like to stress that we will be extremely watchful these next few for evidence of COVID spread in the

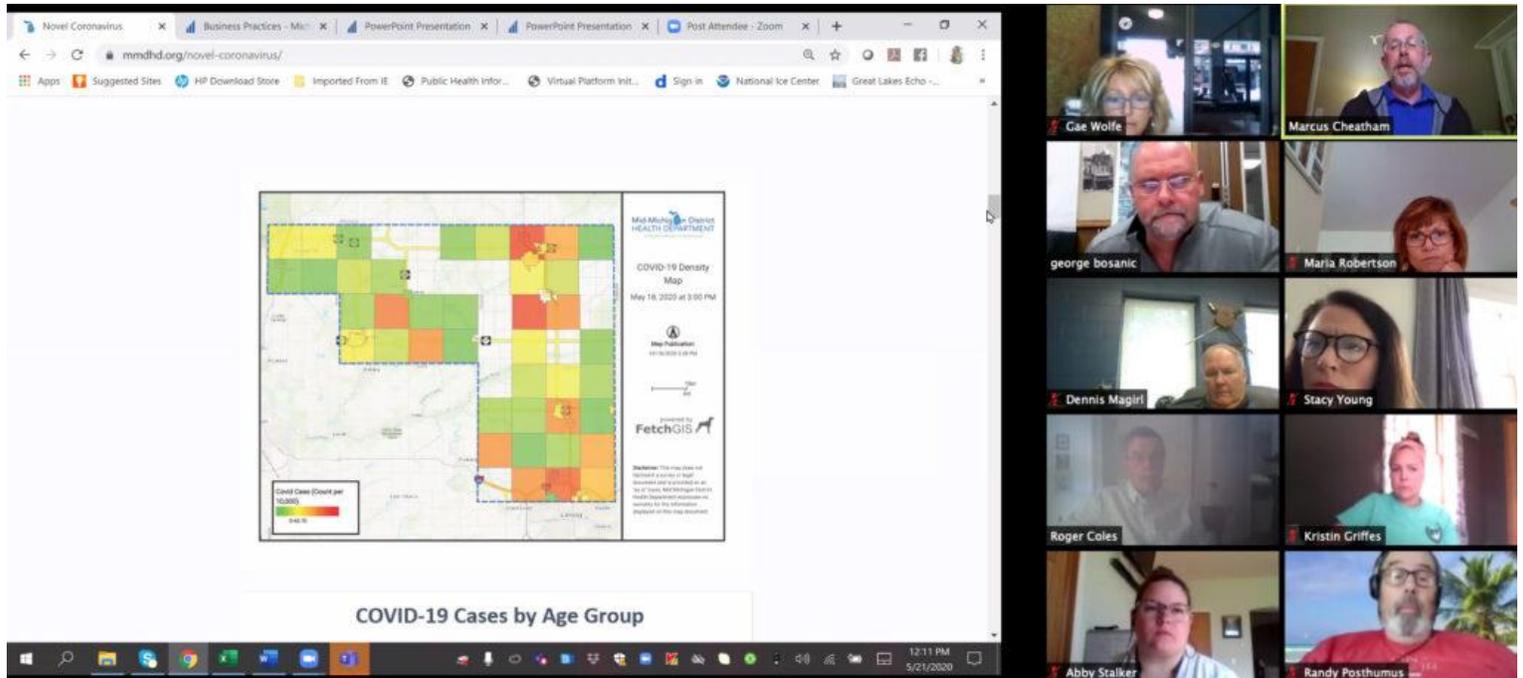
community resulting from the easing of restrictions,” she said. “Frankly, I expect that we will see more COVID now.”

Daily News

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

Health officer offers advice to businesses looking to re-open during coronavirus pandemic

By [Cory Smith](#) | on May 27, 2020



Health Officer Marcus Cheatham of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, top right, goes over details and guidance pertaining to the reopening of businesses during the coronavirus pandemic as others listen to his presentation during an online meeting of the Coalition of Greater Greenville on Thursday. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GREENVILLE — As the executive director of the Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce, Gae Wolfe is well aware of how area businesses are struggling due to the coronavirus.

Her office on Lafayette Street now sits surrounded by closed storefronts, operated by owners who want nothing more than to open their doors. That's why during Thursday's monthly meeting of the Coalition of Greater Greenville (COGG), held via Zoom and organized by Wolfe, she invited Health Officer Marcus Cheatham of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) to provide some guidance and answer questions regarding operating businesses.

As Gov. Gretchen Whitmer continues relaxing restrictions and re-opens portions of society region by region, Cheatham is in a unique position, as it's his department's job to ensure residents, businesses and industry are following the rules of Whitmer' orders.

At the same time, many business owners have reached a breaking point, and are eager to forego the orders early, saying they could do so in a safe manner.

Cheatham understands this frustration, going as far as to also state that without allowing businesses to reopen soon, the state could be even worse off than had they never closed to begin with.

“COVID-19 (is) a brand new disease to everybody. So what I would say, reopening our businesses ...that’s very important. The consequence of not being able to do business ... it’s just as bad as the disease,” he said. “We have places that are going to go out of business very soon if they haven’t already. However, there have been some outbreaks in rural areas, and more localized — churches and restaurants — because people start mingling and then they spread the virus, so we have to follow the guidance, the executive orders.”

So how does one navigate that difficult balance of re-opening, but doing so safely?

Cheatham outlined three items he felt were most important for business owners to consider.

Asymptomatic employees

“The first is the threat of asymptomatic employees,” Cheatham said. “They feel as healthy as a horse. They want to work. You want them to work, and how do you deal with that?”

Cheatham said at the moment, his department is currently working on reported outbreaks throughout the three-county region of Montcalm, Gratiot and Clinton counties, at long-term care facilities.

As of Friday, there were 136 reported positive cases in Clinton County with 10 deaths, 63 cases and five deaths in Gratiot County and 63 cases and one death in Montcalm County.

“COVID is very much still community-spread. People feel the reservoir of the disease might be in the long-term care facilities and it is spreading from there out into the community, and it’s not,” he said. “What’s happening is, employees are becoming ill, but they are asymptomatic — they show no symptoms — so even though there is good screening going on in those long-term care facilities, it’s getting back in and sparking new outbreaks.”

Cheatham said that scenario soon could be the case for businesses as they begin to reopen.

“Safety is absolutely the number one thing we need to think about,” he said. “Risk equals the dose of the virus that you are exposed to times the time that you are exposed to it. If you get a good dose of it, you are around that person for a good period of time, that increases your chance of becoming positive.

“With churches and restaurants, even though people are held socially distant apart, wearing masks, people were singing in services, exhaling the virus, in there for an hour or 90 minutes, and people have wound up being exposed — even though everyone was trying to do the right thing. Everyone wants to eat out, but that’s another environment where, if you are in there, in an enclosed space, your risk goes up.”

Virus exhaustion

Cheatham said as time progresses, many people grow tired of the new way of life living in the coronavirus pandemic and begin putting their guard down.

“People are just sick and tired of being in this weird world and want out and that’s having an impact on what’s happening,” he said.

Cheatham gave an example of his own wife, who he said will not be returning to work once it is deemed appropriate for her to do so.

“My wife works with someone who is a COVID denier — she knows it because she can see it on his Facebook page. When she gets called back to work, she will have to work alongside this guy. She’s become convinced her employer can’t protect her from him, so she’s quit her job because she’s mistrustful of the work environment.”

With that in mind, Cheatham said it’s important for employers to ensure their employees are prepared to re-open safely, otherwise customers and employees may not feel inclined to return.

“One thing that’s really important for employers to do is training employees, so they get that part of their responsibility as an employee is to take this thing seriously — at work, and off work,” he said.

Liability

Perhaps most importantly, according to Cheatham, is the liability that comes with re-opening a business.

Cheatham said if an employer knows there is a risk to the safety of their employees or customers and does nothing to prevent it, they could be liable for negligence.

“We are starting to see COVID-related lawsuits,” he said. “Employers really need to have a plan for that. Absolutely the best thing you can do is document that you are following Michigan’s guidance. That’s why knowing the guidance, It’s really, really important. That way if there’s a lawsuit, it will fail.”

Wolfe said with many of the small businesses in the area not necessarily having the resources of larger stores to keep up with the strict guidelines, there could be difficulties in keeping stores safe.

“I’m thinking about some of the small businesses that may not adhere to safe practices when they reopen,” she said. “If they have an employee that contracts it, would they necessarily be liable?”

“There would be no criminal action,” Cheatham answered, “But the sick person could potentially get a lawyer.”

For additional information regarding rules and best practices going forward in re-opening businesses, visit mmdhd.org online.

LOCAL HEALTH EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON MID-MICHIGAN SPREAD

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By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

April saw the peak of the coronavirus curve in Michigan, but for Gratiot County, May has been rough. Due in part to clusters of cases at two longterm care facilities, Gratiot has gained dozens of positive cases over the past month.

Gratiot's nursing home outbreaks have sparked their fair share of anxieties and rumors about general community spread in Gratiot. Some wonder if patient and resident transfers in hospitals and nursing homes are responsible for bringing COVID-19 into the county — and such speculations have made their way to the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Jan Bunting claimed at last Tuesday's county meeting that the outbreak in the St. Louis nursing home stemmed from the transfer of patients in from Detroit, which is incorrect, according to the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD). As the Herald previously reported, the outbreak at Riverside Healthcare Facility began with a staff member, not a resident.

Even so, concerns persist about the movement of patients throughout the healthcare system, especially from areas hit hard by the virus. But local health experts agree that COVID-positive patients and residents within the healthcare system don't pose a major risk to the health of the general community — and that Gratiot residents are much more likely to pick up the virus from their unmasked neighbor at the grocery store than from their neighborhood nursing home.

While cumulative data about COVID-19 cases is available by county, “the spread of the disease really needs to be thought of regionally,” said Marcus Cheatham, health officer of the MMDHD.

‘Risk of spread’

People “mistakenly think” that their county's outbreaks must be related to one another, but this is not necessarily the case, he said. In reality, people are continually moving throughout the region, creating many opportunities for the virus to spread.

In mid-Michigan in particular, residents frequently drive long distances. Many Gratiot residents hold jobs in another county, and many out-of-county residents commute to Gratiot for work, Cheatham said. Gratiot residents have friends and family across the region.

And, as MidMichigan Health – Central Region President Marita Hattem-Schiffman pointed out, Gratiot has “a major Michigan freeway running through it,” so people from all across Michigan stop by as they travel across the state.

As all of these people come and go from Gratiot, so do those who unknowingly carry COVID-19: and “county lines don't stop a virus,” Hattem-Schiffman said.

While local hospitals and long-term care facilities do indeed have confirmed cases of COVID-19, the staff at these places are thoroughly trained in how to prevent the spread of infection, even in non-pandemic times, she said. And as these healthcare facilities have “doubled down” on the usual precautions and introduced new ones, COVID-positive patients in hospitals and nursing homes are “as secure as they can be.”

In all, Hattem-Schiffman said that Gratiot residents shouldn't be too worried about picking up COVID-19 from one of these facilities.

“I can't say enough that the risk of spread does not come from this small population of COVID impacted people,” she said. “Those not masking in our community pose the greatest risk. We each need to take accountability for our choices and how they may impact others.”

‘Universal precautions’

COVID-19 is not the first infectious disease the health system has dealt with. Because healthcare facilities are “where we go when we are sick,” all parts of the healthcare system have communicable disease — not just

COVID-19, but others as well, including hepatitis, MRSA and Clostridium Difficil, Cheatham said. The inevitable presence of diseases in a healthcare setting is why nurses at every facility are thoroughly trained in “universal precautions” to prevent the spread — and “they are good at that,” he said.

Hattem-Schiffman explained that even in non-pandemic times, infection prevention is a “core competency” for any healthcare setting. In the era of COVID-19, the same rules apply.

All of the normal infection prevention practices are “exactly the same” as they were before, but given the fact that COVID-19 is a novel virus — “meaning no one has immunity to it” — facilities have stepped up their policies even further, she said. They’ve retrained on the use of their familiar personal protective equipment, they’ve introduced new equipment and devices to keep them safe, and they’ve mostly prohibited visitors in order to stop the spread.

In addition to the policies and practices, healthcare facilities are subject to extensive regulation. Cheatham noted that long-term care facilities in particular are subject to a number of different bodies: they are licensed by the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, they must pass regular infection control surveys, and they must comply with Emergency Preparedness guidelines in order to get access to funding, Cheatham said.

Cheatham added that there are also avenues in place for people to raise concerns about longterm care facilities. Anyone who is unhappy with a longterm care facility can contact the office of the Michigan Long-Term Care Ombudsman at (866) 485-9393.

‘People are always moving’

Despite the extensive precautions healthcare systems take, Cheatham still hears many concerns from those who are worried about COVID-19 positive patients transferring facilities. But what many people might not realize is that even in normal operating times, “people are always moving” between facilities in the healthcare system, from hospitals and rehabilitation centers to long-term care and hospice care, he said.

Hattem-Schiffman said that because not all hospitals in a health system have the same capabilities, patients may be moved to a facility that is better equipped to serve their needs. For example, in the MidMichigan Health System, the Mt. Pleasant and Clare locations are not equipped for critical care, so patients needing that level of care would be transferred to another hospital in the system that is equipped for that, such as Gratiot or Midland, she said.

And when a patient no longer requires hospital level care, they are discharged to their home or care facility. These are standard protocols for the treatment of any illness, including COVID-19, which does mean that COVID-positive patients are moved throughout the health system. And patients who were hospitalized for COVID-19 and have recovered enough to breathe on their own are discharged, even if they are still contagious. Hattem-Schiffman said it is standard for patients to be sent home when they no longer need hospital-level support. And considering that most COVID-19 patients do not get sick enough to require hospitalization, the “majority” of COVID-positive patients are already at home, she said.

Hospitals do take care to educate these patients on how to self-quarantine to prevent them from spreading the virus — and because “these patients have been through the worst” of the virus, they are “very motivated to not give it to anyone else,” she said.

Though people might be wary of COVID-positive patients being discharged or sent to another facility, Cheatham said that these are the same procedures that are followed in any epidemic, including flu epidemics. If healthcare systems did not move patients out when they no longer needed hospital-level care, people could die waiting for treatment.

“That would be like what happened in Wuhan, where people were dying on the floor of the emergency room, or at home, because they couldn’t even go to healthcare,” Cheatham said. “It’s a very ghastly scenario.”

In part to address the concerns of the community, the state has set up regional Coronavirus hubs, where COVID-19 patient can be sent if their facility is no longer able to care for them. Cheatham said that these hubs are a “good thing,” and might be a benefit to Gratiot County as its nursing homes continue to navigate COVID-19 outbreaks. The nearest hub to Gratiot County is in Frankenmuth.

‘You can’t keep COVID-19 out forever’

While healthcare facilities, including long-term care facilities, are better equipped to prevent the spread of COVID-19, precautions aren’t completely foolproof. Because people can be very infectious while showing no symptoms, even with diligent screening protocols, Cheatham said that businesses and organizations — including nursing homes — “can’t keep COVID-19 out forever.”

Cheatham shared an example that he recently encountered from the Clinton County Courthouse. An individual, who showed no symptoms of COVID-19, was screened and cleared to enter the courthouse for his trial. He lost his trial, and when he was screened again at the jail, it was discovered he had “spiked a fever” sometime in those few hours.

Even though the courthouse “did all the right things,” they still had COVID-19 exposure in their building — and Cheatham said that this “just goes to show that every now and then, somebody who’s infectious is going to get into your workplace.”

“That’s going to happen in any work setting,” he said. “Even if you’re careful, we will have incidents like these.”

Because of situations like these, Cheatham said that the safest thing is for people to continue to stay home — but as the economy begins to reopen, fewer people will be able to do that. And while some asymptomatic spreaders are inevitable, Cheatham said that it’s “important to be cautious” and follow all guidances and protocols to reduce the spread as much as possible.

“If we follow the Michigan Economic Recovery Commission guidance on how to work safely, then the incidents of [COVID-19] getting into businesses or long-term cares or anywhere else will be much, much lower than they would be otherwise — but it won’t be zero,” he said.

Hattem-Schiffman agrees that it is important for everyone to do their part to stop the spread. People should still be diligent about washing their hands, which is the “number one way to prevent the spread of infection anywhere in the world, not just in hospitals,” she said. And when in public spaces, act as if you have the virus: wear a mask in order protect others from yourself.

Though she understands that these practices “get very tedious” as time goes on, she said it’s everyone’s responsibly to protect one another from COVID-19.

“As members of the human race, we each bear an accountability to do our part to not let virus spread... Every one of us should be voluntarily masking to ensure we are not spreading this virus,” she said.

Daily News

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Mid-Michigan District Health Department set to reopen Monday, will resume vaccinations

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on May 28, 2020

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) is set to reopen and resume some services Monday, including vaccinations.



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham announced during Wednesday's Board of Health meeting that the health department will reopen Monday and begin offering public services again, including vaccinations. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Health Officer Marcus Cheatham made the announcement during a virtual Board of Health meeting Wednesday morning.

“All Michigan businesses and public and private organizations are making arrangements for reopening in some form,” Cheatham noted. “We intend to proceed cautiously. The main threat to the health department has been revenue losses during the closure due to a decline in environmental health fees and billing insurances for services provided through the community health and education division. Therefore, the MMDHD must move forward with reopening.”

Cheatham said the health department will follow the guidance of the Michigan Economic Recovery Council in reopening. The health department's plan includes keeping as many of its employees working from home for as long as possible, except for in the environmental health division, where low-risk outdoor field work resumed May 7.

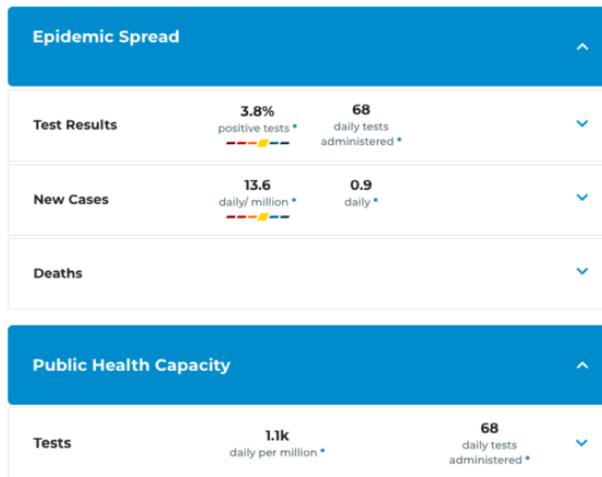
Immunization services will resume by mid-June, which Cheatham said is needed as the state of Michigan has given 20% fewer immunizations this year compared to one year ago.

The health department's Women, Infants & Children (WIC) and Children's Special Health Care Services programs have continued throughout the pandemic.

Cheatham also showed the Board of Health the state of Michigan's new MI Safe Start dashboard ([mistartmap.info/](https://mstartmap.info/)) which shows coronavirus spread and public health capacity statistics for Michigan counties.

Data as of Fri May 22 2020 | excludes correctional facilities

* Average over previous seven days



The MI Safe Start online dashboard was recently launched detailing coronavirus epidemic spread and public health capacity statistics, such as Montcalm County, as pictured. The new dashboard was discussed during Wednesday’s Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health meeting. — Screenshot

Montcalm County is averaging less than one new coronavirus case per day and an average of 68 tests are being administered daily, compared to Ionia County’s average of 2.4 new cases per day and 65.9 tests being done per day, according to the dashboard.

Cheatham reported on an effort between the health department and the Meijer in Alma both working to provide drive-thru testing to Gratiot County residents. He said the health department also asked Walmart and Walgreen’s in Gratiot County, but those stores weren’t interested.

“Montcalm County has drive-thru testing at Sparrow Carson Hospital,” Cheatham told the Daily News. “Gratiot County has none, that is why we are focusing there.”

Health Department Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse noted more testing isn’t necessarily helpful for reducing the spread of the virus.

“Testing isn’t foolproof,” she said. “People can be infected and test negative. People can test positive for up to 60 days after being infected when they’re really only contagious for about 10 days. Testing is helpful, but just being negative doesn’t mean that you’re safe to go to work. From a public health standpoint, it’s not an end-all, be-all from a public health perspective. It is a very, very complicated thing.”

Cheatham said he was aware of “a couple” of citations that were issued to local businesses for allegedly violating the governor’s executive orders, but he doesn’t think citations will continue to be issued.

“We are entering a period of COVID fatigue and law enforcement have told me that they do not think the public will be cooperative from here on out,” he said. “We’re experiencing a lot of fatigue from law enforcement officers about dealing with complaints and responding to complaints. I think we’re going to see less and less law enforcement responding to complaints. At this point in time, that’s inevitable. They’ve got so many other things they want to focus on.”

Running With Scissors Salon in Edmore was the first — and only, to the Daily News’ knowledge — business in Montcalm County to be ticketed with a misdemeanor citation in relation to one of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s orders.

Chastity Snyder of McBride, the salon owner, was ticketed on May 6 by a Montcalm County sheriff’s deputy for an alleged “violation of executive order 69.” Snyder says she believes Whitmer’s authority ended April 30 and that the citation is “bogus.” She plans to fight the charge and she is scheduled to appear in Montcalm County District Court in June.

COVID-19 VS INFLUENZA

Morse gave what she called a “Debbie Downer report” to the Board of Health regarding living with the coronavirus in the future.



Dr. Jennifer Morse

Morse said the coronavirus strain SARS-CoV caused a SARS outbreak with about 8,098 cases and 774 deaths in 24 countries in 2002 and 2003, and the coronavirus strain MERS-CoV caused a MERS outbreak with about 2,519 cases and 866 deaths in 27 countries in 2012.

Morse said this new strain of the coronavirus is different because it caused a global pandemic. She said while SARS and MERS caused people to become severely ill and those viruses were mostly spread among healthcare workers caring for patients in hospitals, in comparison COVID-19 is causing a more mild form of illness, meaning it’s more easily spreading throughout communities.

Morse said while COVID-19 has a lower death rate, it's more contagious than SARS and MERS, which has resulted in the global pandemic.

Morse said the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) published "COVID-19: The CIDRAP Viewpoint Part 1: The Future of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons Learned from Pandemic Influenza" on April 30, which looked to prior influenza pandemics to attempt to make predictions about the future of COVID-19.

According to that study, this strain of the coronavirus is similar to previous influenza pandemics over history in that both viruses are spread mostly by respiratory droplets and both can be spread by someone before they have symptoms or who has never had symptoms. The current strain of the coronavirus and influenza pandemic viruses are/were both new viruses that the world population doesn't/didn't have immunity to, making million of people vulnerable to infection.

According to the study, there are some differences between COVID-19 and the pandemic influenza that may make them difficult to compare. The average incubation period for the influenza is two days but can range from one to four days, while the average incubation period for COVID-19 is five days but can range from two to 14 days, allowing it to spread without notice more than influenza. Influenza can be without symptoms from 4% to 28% of the time, but COVID-19 can be without symptoms from 6% to 41% of the time, which also allows it to spread without notice. The amount of virus produced by those with influenza peaks one or two days after symptoms start, while the amount of virus produced by those with COVID-19 peaks just before and during the first several days of illness.

According to the study, the contagion rate for past influenza pandemics has been from 1.46 to 1.8, while the contagion rate for this current pandemic is from 2.2 to 3.3 (these numbers are measured based on the basic reproductive number, which is the average number of newly infected people that are caused by one infected person if everyone in the community is completely susceptible to the infecting organism).

Morse said of the eight influenza pandemics that have occurred since the early 1700s, there does not seem to be any seasonal pattern. Seven of the pandemics had an early peak followed by a second peak around six months later, while some had smaller waves of cases over the two years following the first wave.

"Since COVID-19 is more contagious, more people will need to become immune before the pandemic can end," Morse said. "It is estimated 60% to 70% of the population needs to be immune before this pandemic stops. This will likely take 18 to 24 more months. A vaccine, when and if available, may help us to reach the goal levels of immunity, but one likely will not be available until 2021, and there are many potential causes for delay."

The Board of Health unanimously approved Morse's medical director report, with one board member expressing some concern.

"I vote yes, with reservations on how public this will go," Gratiot County Commissioner Chuck Murphy said.

"I think it's public right now," one meeting attendee said.

"It's a public meeting," another attendee noted.

Daily News

Friday, May 29, 2020

Health department purchases new fleet of copiers, printers

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on May 29, 2020



The Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health on Wednesday voted to purchase a new fleet of copier and printer equipment from Ricoh at a cost of \$74,569. The move is expected to save the organization \$36,000 per year. — Screenshot

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health has voted to purchase a new fleet and light production machine of copier and printer equipment from Ricoh for \$74,569.

The move is expected to save the organization \$36,000 per year and the total cost will be amortized over eight years at \$9,321 per year, according to Health Department Executive Administrative Assistant Cindy Partlo, who presented

the financial information at Wednesday's virtual meeting of the Board of Health, which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties.

The health department also received quotes from Applied Imaging for \$201,328 and from Michigan Office Solutions for \$78,093.

Some health officials expressed concern at making such a major purchase amid likely budget reductions due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I get a little anxious," Health Officer Marcus Cheatham admitted. "It's really a bet on two things — that we will be getting back to normal and it definitely assumes a healthy staffing level on our part."

"I'm not sure it's the right time," Administrative Services Director Melissa Selby agreed. "We're very uncertain about how things are going to be next year. I see no problem with holding off on the light production."

Partlo said the light production machine will allow the health department to produce a variety of literature in-house.

"We have several brochures that staff need periodically throughout the year," she said. "Those documents are stored in the machine and the setup is already there. If family planning needs 100 brochures, they go and press a button and it spits out 100, there's no setup. That was my thought on how that was going to work. I think having the light production will be a good thing."

Cheatham agreed that the savings gained with the new Ricoh fleet made sense, along with the ability for the health department to print its own documents. He also noted the health department currently has \$489,000 in an office equipment fund for computers, services and software in addition to office equipment such as copiers and printers.

Ricoh's headquarters are based in Tokyo, Japan, leading Gratiot County Commissioner Chuck Murphy to ask, "Did we look at whether any of these companies are making these products in the United States?"

"I personally doubt that anybody makes them in the United States," Gratiot County Commissioner George Bailey noted.

Partlo said she was recommending purchasing from Ricoh as that company is part of the state of Michigan's MiDeal, an extended purchasing program that allows Michigan municipalities to buy goods and services from state contracts. The program features approximately 400 contracts available, was authorized by Michigan legislation and has been in existence since 1984 (more information can be found at michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-358-82550_85753--,00.html).

"I'll add it to my list for my state representative that they need to start working on," Murphy said.

The Board of Health unanimously approved the Ricoh fleet purchase.

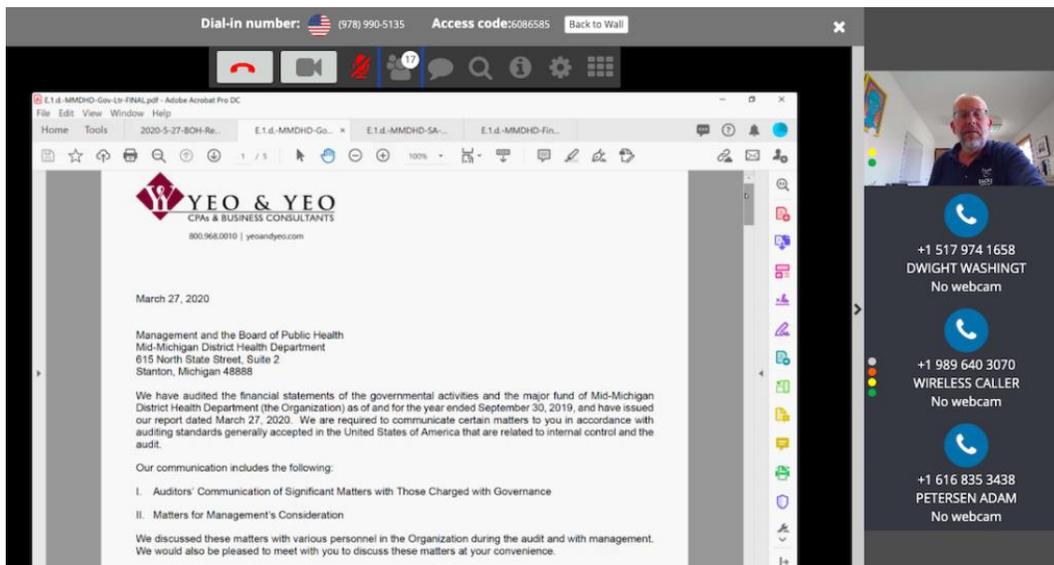
Daily News

Saturday, May 30, 2020

Mid-Michigan District Health Department receives clean audit report

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on May 30, 2020

The budget forecast may be uncertain for 2020 and beyond, but the Mid-Michigan District Health Department has received an “unmodified” audit rating for 2019 financials, which is the highest level of opinion an auditor can render.



Ali Barnes, not pictured, from Yeo & Yeo CPAs & Business Consultants, gave an audit report to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health on Wednesday. The health department received an “unmodified” audit rating — the highest level of opinion an auditor can render on financial statements. Health Officer Marcus Cheatham is pictured at upper right. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Ali Barnes from Alma-based Yeo & Yeo CPAs & Business Consultants reported the good news to the Board of Health during a virtual meeting Wednesday.

“That’s the one you want us to give you,” said Barnes of the unmodified or clean audit rating.

Barnes said the health department had “healthy” cash balances of \$3.4 million and was able to add about \$100,000 back to its fund balance. The health department’s fund balance is \$2.4 million.

“That’s a positive, especially given what you’re potentially going into in an era where funding is going to be a little unsure here for a while,” she noted.

Barnes noted the health department does have a net pension liability of \$2.9 million and is funded at 80%. Barnes also conducted an audit of how the health department is expending its federal dollars and that audit returned clean results as well.

“For the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2020, close monitoring of the federal and state budget actions will continue to be important related to lack of economic increases and/or further possible cuts in funding provided through state grant agreements, including those that originate at the federal level and other state funding mechanisms,” Barnes noted. “The department’s operating budget could be significantly impacted by changes in state funding, permit activity and billing reimbursement, therefore it will be monitored closely.”

Health Officer Marcus Cheatham noted financial planning is currently difficult for the health department due to all the coronavirus pandemic uncertainties.

“It looks like we’ll get through this year OK,” he said. “We might have a manageable deficit that manageable through fund balances. It’s next year that will be really murky for us. Doing a forecast right now is just basically being aware of the different things that could happen without attaching any probabilities to it. I think we have to attach the worst and the best to it at the same time.”

“I think we’re going to be OK, this year, I’m a little more worried about next year,” agreed Administrative Services Director Melissa Selby.

STATE

Vaccination rates drop, outbreak risk a concern

DETROIT » Public health officials worry future outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases could emerge in Michigan as vaccination rates have dramatically fallen during the coronavirus pandemic.

Vaccination rates for children 18 and younger fell by more than 20%, according to a study published by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Measles vaccinations in particular, dropped about 76% among 16-month-old children. Other diseases include mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, or whooping cough.

Many parents worried about the virus have kept their young children home, doctors say.

“I’m extremely concerned that anytime we see a drop-off in our vaccine rates that it does leave the door open for a potential outbreak,” Bob Swanson, director of the division of immunization at the Michigan Department of Public Health told The Detroit News.

Researchers compared how many kids have been vaccinated this May versus May rates from 2016-2019, and found fewer than half of babies who are currently 5 months old were up-to-date on their immunizations compared to prior years. They relied on data from the Michigan Care Program Registry, which tracks immunizations statewide.

Dr. David Obudzinski, a pediatrician, said parents began canceling appointments in March, when stay-at-home orders were issued. His Bingham Farms practice has remained open throughout the pandemic but was forced to reduce its hours due to lack of patients.

— *The Associated Press*

CORONAVIRUS

9 of Gratiot's 11 COVID-19 victims from nursing homes

By Eric Baerren*ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com*
Multimedia journalist

Nine of the people who've died of COVID-19 in Gratiot County lived at the two nursing homes that reported outbreaks.

Five of them were residents of Masonic Pathways and four lived at Riverside Healthcare Center, said Leslie Kinnee, spokeswoman for Mid Michigan District Health Department.

The results are similar with what happened in Isabella County, where five and maybe six of the deaths took place at two of the county's nursing homes.

Both counties have more than 70 confirmed cases, with more than half of Gratiots potentially tied to nursing homes.

Fourteen employees of Masonic Pathways have tested positive for the virus, said CEO Mike Long in a Monday morning update message. Everyone who has tested positive for the disease was as-

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sociated with the Jack F. Saunders Health Care Center. Two other Masonic facilities — PACE Care Center, 1750 E. Bellows St., in Mt. Pleasant; and Warwick Living Facility, 525 N. State St., in Alma — remain COVID-free.

Isabella announced one new positive case since Friday afternoon, for a cumulative total of 77 positive tests. The Central Michigan District Health Department lists 50 as recovered. People described as recovered are still alive 30 days after testing positive and are not

in the hospital.

The county's biggest outbreak hit the Isabella County Medical Care Facility, where 23 residents were ultimately infected. The facility announced last week that the last of the 18 residents who tested positive met the criteria of recovered.

Another person who lived at MediLodge Mt. Pleasant died in early April.

Gratiot's cases remained static at 74. Midland County (82 cases/eight deaths), Montcalm (66/1), Mecosta (2½), Clare (19/2) all saw their confirmed case numbers increase by one. Gladwin County (18/1) was unchanged.

Statewide, another 135 cases were announced for a total of

57,532 and another 25 deaths were announced for a total of 5,516.

In the five days previous to Friday, an average of 15,143 tests per day were conducted state wide, with an average response rate of 4.5 percent as positive. In Region 6, the state police emergency preparedness district that Isabella, Clare, Mecosta and Montcalm belong to, an average of 2,079 tests were conducted each day during that span with an average of 5 percent of them coming back positive.

Eric Baerren is a multimedia journalist for The Morning Sun in Mt. Pleasant, where he has served as a columnist in recent years.

Daily News

Tuesday, June 2, 2020

Montcalm County offices open to public again, but many doors remain locked

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on June 02, 2020

STANTON — As an emergency medical technician, Kendra Battig is used to spending her days responding to emergencies and running the Rescue 26 truck out of Greenville.



Warren Wells of Stanton points toward the Montcalm County Building Department as his destination as Kendra Battig, an emergency medical technician for Montcalm County Emergency Services, screens him for coronavirus symptoms and signs him in Monday morning at the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton — the first day of Montcalm County government buildings reopening to the public since March 24. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

But this week found the Montcalm County Emergency Services EMT trying on a different hat.

Beginning at 8 a.m. Monday, Battig’s new work station was just inside the west entrance of the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton, which has been closed to the public since March 24 but reopened Monday after a vote by the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners last week.

Sitting behind a table lined with screening questionnaires, coronavirus literature, disinfectant spray, paper towels, hand sanitizer and face masks, Battig began her new part-time job of screening all visitors for coronavirus symptoms.

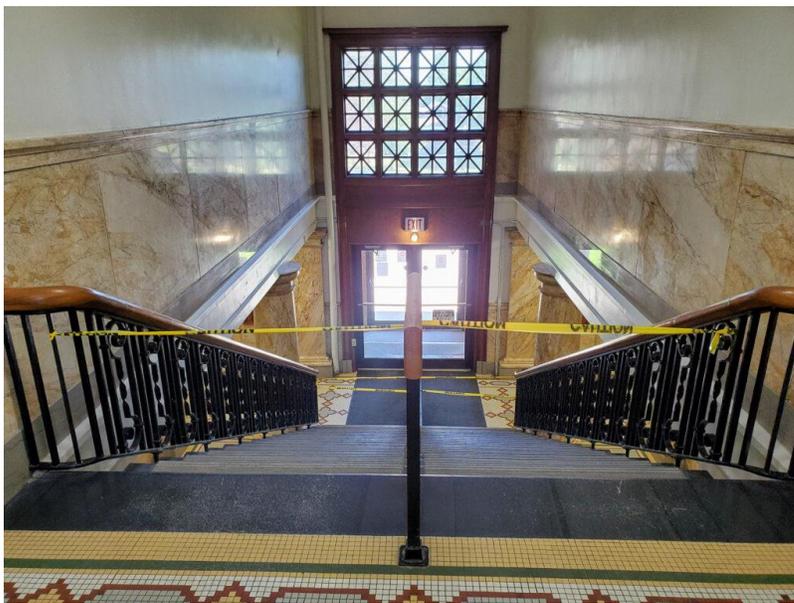
Battig greets each visitor and hands them a sheet, asking them to sign their name, which office they are visiting and to check off the following questions: In the past 24 hours, have you experienced an atypical cough, atypical shortness of breath, fever of 100 degrees F or above, chills or repeated shaking, muscle pain, sore throat, headache and new or loss of taste or smell? If a visitor answers “yes” to any of those symptoms, they are not permitted to access the building and are given a COVID-19 fact sheet from the CDC.

Visitors must also answer: In the past 14 days, have you had close contact (within 6 feet for a prolonged period of time with anyone with a diagnosis of COVID-19? Have you traveled internationally or domestically? If they answer “yes” to either of those questions, they also are not permitted to access the building.

Battig also asks visitors for their name, email address and phone number in case she has to contact them later regarding possible exposure to the coronavirus.

“The county employees have been great,” said Battig regarding the new screening process. “The customers coming in, most of them have been great. I have gotten a little bit of pushback from some individuals, mostly about masks but also about the screening in general. I got the impression they felt it was intrusive. Another person made it feel like it was a waste of time and pointless to be doing this. I expected that.”

Battig said she and other Emergency Services personnel who volunteered for the screening job will take turns doing shifts inside the Administrative Building, which houses the Building Department, the Controller-Administrator’s Office, the Clerk’s Vital Records/Elections Office, the Register of Deeds Office and the Treasurer’s Office. The building also houses the Michigan State University Extension Office, which remains closed for now.



Yellow caution tape cordons off the stairway leading to and from the main entrance of the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton. The main entrance remains closed but as of Monday residents can now enter the

building via the west entrance to visit the Building Department, the Controller-Administrator's Office, the Clerk's Vital Records/Elections Office, the Register of Deeds Office and the Treasurer's Office. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

The Register of Deeds Office and Treasurer's Office are both back to serving people through locked doors via passing documents and money through old-fashioned mail slots in the doors. Both of those offices are scheduled to have sneeze guards installed this week for additional protection when doors are finally unlocked.

Register of Deeds Lori Wilson said two people came in first thing Monday morning to use the property search computers available in a public room on the second floor. People are able to search county properties from 1988 to present online, but older properties must be accessed via county computers.

"I'm happy because we're part of the financial institutions and we've been doing a lot of searching for them and working late at night trying to do things for them and now they can do the searching themselves," Wilson said. "Big wind and solar farms are going on and mortgages have still happened. We're not any slower with our numbers. Real estate in Montcalm County is still going good."

On the ground floor of the building, the Building Department has been open since May 7, but now that a designated screener is at the west entrance, those employees no longer have to individually screen visitors.

"It saves us having to go meet somebody outside and let them in," noted Andy Arwood who works in the Building Department office.

Upon the third floor of the building, not many people visit the Controller-Administrator's Office on a typical day anyway.

"I think it's a good thing," said Interim Controller-Administrator Brenda Taeter of the building reopening. "It needs to happen."

'Why are we outside of the executive order?'

Not all county employees are happy about what they view as the Board of Commissioners forcing them to reopen their offices to the public.

Clerk Kristen Millard noted the Circuit Court Clerk's Office in the courthouse across town remains closed to the public until at least June 22 due to an order from the State Court Administrative Office in Lansing, but due to the county board's vote, the Clerk's Vital Records/Elections Office now must be open.

"I'm uncomfortable with being open against the governor's order," Millard said. "We were still fully servicing our customers. That makes me uncomfortable. Why are we outside of the executive order? What's changed?"

"Maybe the horse came out before the cart," Deputy Clerk Nan Hagerman agreed. "Maybe we shouldn't have closed to begin with if they were going to open up before the order has ended. Why did we close? Why did we open? What's changed?"

Next door to the Administrative Building, the Drain Commission Office is also open.

Across town on the north side of Stanton, the Commission on Aging facility is once again fully staffed, but the door is locked to the public and Director Ryan Dreyer declined to meet the Daily News outside.

Dreyer also expressed concern with how the county board handled the reopening.

“I think there have been some miscommunications in terms of how things are being rolled out,” he said. “I do have some reservations that it’s been rushed a little. We’re just trying to make the best that we can out of this situation.”

Dreyer said congregate meals and transportation services remain on hold, as do direct care services that involve aides visiting people in their home. He said meal delivery continues as it has since county offices first closed in March and wellness checks continue via telephone to clients. He said a new grocery shopping service has also been implemented to help some clients as needed.

“We’re just trying to be creative with ways that we can interact with the population we serve,” he said. “We’ve got a timeline kind of set up, not dates but more of a data-driven timeline regarding when we’ll start those services up again. We don’t have any services that we’re operating right now that require face to face interaction.”

Dreyer said people are asked to call (989) 831-7476 to ask any questions about Commission on Aging services and screening will proceed from there if a visit is needed.

Next door to the Commission on Aging, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department also technically reopened Monday, but the door was locked when the Daily News visited.

Public Information Office Leslie Kinnee told the Daily News via email that family planning and immunization clinics resumed by appointment Monday. She said the health department has been offering some family planning services and environmental health services by appointment during the agency’s closure. She said while working from home, health department staff have also been serving Women, Infant and Children (WIC) clients, Children’s Special Health Care clients, working on routine communicable disease cases and community health workers have also been assisting clients from home. People can call (989) 831-5237 for more information.

GRATIOT COUNTY

2 more virus cases, at least 1 likely at Pathways

By Eric Baerren*ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com**@ebaerren on Twitter*

The number of COVID-19 cases in Gratiot County increased by two overnight to 76, with at least one of them appearing to be a resident of Masonic Pathways.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services announced in its daily update Tuesday that the outbreak there now included 19 residents, up one from Monday's announced total of 18.

Five residents of Pathways' Jack F. Saunders Health Care Center have died from the disease, and that facility has been the location for the entire Pathways

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Cases

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outbreak. None of Masonic's independent or assisted living facilities, nor its PACE Care Center, 1503 E. Bellows, in Mt. Pleasant, nor Warwick Living Center, 525 N. State St., have had any cases.

Another four have died at an outbreak at Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis. The combined nine deaths at the two account for nearly all of Gratiot's 11 deaths from the disease.

Nursing homes are a significant source of COVID-19 deaths across the United States. A report released Monday said that approximately a quarter of all Americans who have died were nursing home residents. That is nearly 26,000 people.

As of May 24, approx-

imately 5,200 nursing home residents in the state of Michigan have died from the disease, the fifth highest total across the country.

Isabella County's confirmed cases increased by one to 78. Seven people have died of the disease. They were the only two mid-Michigan counties with new diseases. Clare (19 cases, 2 deaths), Mecosta (21, 2), Montcalm (66, 1), Gladwin (18, 1), Midland (82/8) all stayed the same.

Statewide, another 199 cases were announced for a total of 57,731, and another 37 deaths for a total of 5,553. Eleven of those deaths, however, came after the causes of death on death certificates were matched against a statewide disease database. Where the state database didn't list a COVID death, those were corrected.

Gratiot COVID-19 Deaths Surpass Isabella, Midland

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Gratiot County saw more COVID-19 deaths this week than any of its neighbors, with five individuals having passed away since last Tuesday. The county's COVID-19 death toll has now reached double-digits.

As of press time on Tuesday, Gratiot County is reporting 76 cumulative positive cases of COVID-19 and 11 deaths, up from 71 cases and 6 deaths last week. A representative from the MidMichigan District Health Department (MMDHD) could not confirm whether any of these deaths were related to the outbreaks at Masonic Pathways or Riverside Healthcare Center, although Masonic is reporting four fewer current resident cases than last week.

Elsewhere in mid-Michigan, new COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to slow. Montcalm County is reporting 66 cases and one death, gaining one new case and no deaths over the past week. Clinton County gained two cases and one death, reporting a total of 140 cases and 11 deaths.

The COVID-19 case count in Gratiot continues to near that of Isabella and Midland, while the death toll has surpassed that of those two counties. Isabella County gained four new cases and no deaths over the past week, reporting a total of 78 cases and seven deaths. And Midland County gained three new cases and no deaths, reporting a total of 82 cases and eight deaths.

Saginaw county gained 50 cases and two deaths this week, and is now reporting a total of 1,050 cases and 109 deaths.

As of Tuesday, Michigan is reporting 57,731 cumulative COVID-19 cases statewide, and 5,553 deaths.

A majority of the Gratiot County's COVID-19 cases are associated with outbreaks at Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis and Masonic Pathways in Alma. Al Raza, Riverside facility administrator, said that the outbreak has been contained at the facility, and that no new cases have been identified.

Though asked, Raza did not confirm how many total resident or employee COVID-19 cases have been identified since the beginning of the outbreak at the end of April, nor did he confirm how many current positive cases are at the facility.

Leslie Kinnee, public information officer with the MMDHD, previously shared with the Herald on May 19 that Riverside had 19 resident cases and 4 staff cases at that time, and that three residents had passed away.

At Masonic Pathways in Alma, 14 current resident cases and 14 staff cases are being reported as of Tuesday, compared to 18 resident cases and 12 staff cases last Tuesday. It is unclear how many of Gratiot's COVID-19 deaths are associated with the outbreak at Masonic Pathways, as the MMDHD's Kinnee was not able to confirm this information by press time.

Although Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced on Monday that she would be lifting the state's shelter-in-place order, longterm care facility safety guidelines remain in place. Visitation restriction will remain in place at least through June 26.

No new COVID-19 inmate or staff cases have been discovered at the Central Michigan Correctional Facility this week. That facility continues to report six inmate cases and three staff cases, numbers which are not reflected in Gratiot County's total. The Michigan Department of Corrections reports their data separately.

The Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, June 11, 2020

No New Deaths Reported in Gratiot as COVID-19 Cases Slow

**By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer**

After seeing cases spike for several weeks, Gratiot County has gained only a handful of new cases — and no new deaths — since last Tuesday.

Gratiot gained only three cases this week, fewer new cases than either of its neighbors in the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) this week. As of Tuesday, Gratiot County is reporting a cumulative total of 79 COVID-19 cases and 11 COVID-related deaths. Montcalm County gained seven cases, and is reporting 73 cases and one death, and Clinton County gained five cases for a total of 145 positive cases and 11 deaths.

No COVID-related deaths were reported any MMDHD county over the past week.

In Isabella County, no new COVID-19 cases or deaths were reported this week. Isabella continues to report 78 cases and 7 deaths as of Tuesday. Midland County gained eight cases and one death, report-

ing a total 90 cases and nine deaths. And Saginaw County gained 58 cases and three deaths over the past week, and is reporting a total of 1,108 cases and 112 deaths.

Statewide, Michigan is reporting a cumulative total of 59,107 COVID-19 cases and 5,698 COVID-related deaths.

Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced earlier this month that the state has moved into the fourth phase, “Improving,” of the MI Safe Start Plan. Restrictions have been eased on several businesses, with all retail allowed to open their doors to in-person patronage without appointments, subject to capacity limits. Bars and restaurants were allowed to open starting Monday, also subject to capacity limits.

Personal care services including hair, massages, and nails will be allowed to reopen statewide beginning on June 15.

While Gratiot County saw a later peak in COVID-19 cases than its neighbors, this latest wave of reopening comes as Gratiot’s cases have slowed. Just over two-

thirds of the county’s cumulative positive cases are related to cluster outbreaks in two long-term care facilities. Resident and staff cases at both Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis and Masonic Pathways in Alma account for 54 of Gratiot’s 79 cases, according to the MMDHD.

As for those outbreaks, Masonic Pathways is reporting fewer current cases of COVID-19 this week, with 14 residents and 6 staff members currently ill. And the outbreak at Riverside Healthcare Center has been contained for weeks, with no new cases reported since May 15, according to the MMDHD.

Nine of the 11 COVID-related deaths the county were residents at these nursing homes: four from Riverside Healthcare Center and five from Masonic Pathways.

As COVID-19 cases slow in Gratiot, county residents will have another opportunity to get tested for the virus: the MMDHD is hosting a free COVID-19 testing clinic for community members on

Saturday, June 13 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Donald L. Pavlik Middle School in Alma.

Testing will be available for anyone over the age of 18, even those who show no symptoms, said Leslie Kinnee, MMDHD public information officer. No screening is needed, and a doctor’s order is not required.

The National Guard will be performing the testing, and MMDHD staff and other volunteers will be “providing support,” Kinnee said.

Individuals seeking to be tested will need bring a form of ID, either a state- or country-issued ID or paperwork such as a bill, paystub, or mail that contains your name and address.

“People in high risk roles are highly encouraged to attend,” Kinnee said.

Antibody testing, which would determine whether an individual had COVID-19 in the past and has recovered, will not be available.

Lakeview Area News

Thursday, June 11, 2020

Take Precautions to Avoid Getting Bitten by Mosquitoes

**By Leslie Kinnee
Mid-Michigan District
Health Department
Public Information
Officer**

Michiganders have been cooped up indoors since mid-March, so now that the warmer weather is here, we're all more than ready to head outside for a little fun in the sun. In addition to applying sunscreen to protect our skin from harmful rays, it's also important to take steps to prevent getting bitten by mosquitoes.

Mosquitoes are known carriers of West Nile Virus (WNV), a disease that is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird.

Most people who contract WNV have no symptoms, but some may become ill three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms of West Nile virus

can include high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, stiff neck and a severe headache. More serious complications include meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain linings) and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). These diseases usually require hospitalization, can be life threatening, and even fatal.

One of the best ways you can protect yourself and your family is to apply an insect repellent, especially between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active and most likely to bite. with DEET, Picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus or para-menthane-diol or 2-undercanone (following manufacturer's directions). Don't use repellent on children under two months old. Instead, dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs and cover the crib, stroller and baby carrier with mosquito netting.

Additional precautions include:

* Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks when heading outside.

*Treat clothing with repellent.

*Make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens and repair those with tears or openings.

*Empty water once a week from mosquito breeding sites such as bird baths, buckets, unused wading pools and old tires.

Additional information can be found at www.cdc.gov/westnile. See Michigan.gov/emergingdiseases for information about current WNV activity in Michigan, including a summary of where WNV infection has been detected in mosquitoes, animals and people.