

Daily News

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

GPS drafting plans for in-person learning; online alternatives will also be available

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GREENVILLE — In five weeks time, students will be returning to school to begin the next chapter of their K-12 education, but how that chapter will be read is currently anyone's guess, as it's still being written.

During Monday's meeting of the Greenville Public Schools (GPS) Board of Education, held virtually via Zoom, nearly 50 people were in attendance, about half of them concerned parents, teachers and members of the community, as the start date for school approaches while the coronavirus pandemic continues to linger.

On June 30, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Return to School Advisory Council released its official MI Safe Schools Roadmap, outlining a number of recommendations and requirements that schools in Michigan will need to follow if they are expected to conduct in-person learning.

The majority of schools, including Greenville, are committed to offering classes "in-person," while also providing online options, but a number of obstacles and still stand in the way of seeing that goal come to fruition.

"Our intent is to be back in person, pending any changes. We will make a commitment to safely bring students back into the classroom, in person, because we believe the best instruction takes place in person, but we want to do that safely and we will do that safely," Superintendent Linda Van Houten said. "We will follow the Roadmap guide and we will use the advice of our parents, community members, health department and public safety. Our goal is to ensure a safe and flexible learning plan that meets the needs of our staff and our students while making sure that we can continue to provide a high-quality program for our kids."

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Greenville Public Schools Superintendent Linda Van Houten, top row, center, answers questions during Monday's Board of Education meeting, attended by nearly 50 people, including parents who expressed concerns regarding the upcoming school year, which is scheduled to begin Aug. 19. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GPS drafting plans for in-person learning

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According to Van Houten, the school district's task force met Tuesday to begin work on what that in-person environment will look like throughout seven school buildings that serve to instruct more than 3,600 students while employing more than 400 in staff. Plans are being developed and those plans will eventually be shown to the public and approved by the Board of Education in August.

The plans will be created in consideration of all six phases of the governor's MI Safe Start Plan.

Currently in Phase 4, "Improving," Van Houten said the district will first implement the requirements outlined in the state's Roadmap plan, which include:

- Teachers and students wearing masks.
- Screening of everyone who enters a school building.
- Limiting visitors to the buildings.
- Keeping cohorts of students together.
- Minimizing movement of students and teachers through the halls.
- Maximizing space between seating in the classrooms.
- Limiting larger group gatherings.
- Serving meals in the classrooms.

"We are continuing to develop our plan for the return to school. Some protocols will look different at the elementary level than the secondary level and we will update our stakeholders as additional information becomes available," Van Houten said. "We believe in-person instruction is the best option to educate our students in order to make personal connections for learning, but we also understand some students have individual needs that may need to be met in a different way."

As a result, Van Houten said Greenville has expanded its already-existing Legacy Learning online learning program from grades 9-12 to K-12.

"This is an option for students and families who are not able to or who are uncomfortable with returning to in-person instruction," Van Houten said. "GPS is committed to being ready to meet the needs of every student and we are excited to welcome our students back to our schools in the fall."

Van Houten said much of what will be implemented will be determined by the

status of the coronavirus in Montcalm and Kent counties, where the majority of Greenville students, teachers and staff reside.

"The healthier we are, the more normal our upcoming school year can be for our children. Our efforts, as a community, will make a significant and positive difference," she said. "Michigan has been leading the way in flattening the curve and we cannot stop now. Every time we choose to maintain social distance, wear a mask in public places, wash our hands and take necessary precautions recommended to us by our health experts, we are making a positive impact toward our students being able to return to their classrooms."

PARENT CONCERNS

Prior to Van Houten outlining the initial details of the in-progress plan, a number of parents asked questions regarding the start of school.

"If kids go to school, physically, full time, what's the plan for the district if a kid tests positive for COVID-19? Is the child going to be taken out of school?" asked Brad Kloosterman of Oakfield Township, adding he and his wife Jenny have four children, two of whom attend Lincoln Heights Elementary School.

According to Van Houten, any student who tests positive would be isolated "right away," with their situation immediately being turned over to the health department.

"We've been in partnership with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, meeting at least weekly," she said. "They would investigate that specific situation and perform contact tracing. They will then make a determination of who all needs to be quarantined and what the next steps are."

New Greenville resident Melissa Gekeler, whose children will be attending Baldwin Heights Elementary School, asked when parents can expect to know the details of the school district's plan.

According to Van Houten, she expects a final decision with details released "in the next two weeks."

"We will then communicate out to everyone the exact plan, and the details to that plan," Van Houten said. "Once we get that input from the task force, we will work with administrators to put together a

detailed plan, which will come back to the Board of Education to be approved by Aug. 17."

Greta Skogseth of Greenville, who has a daughter at Greenville High School, was concerned about her child taking virtual classes and how they would be perceived by colleges compared to in-person classes.

"Will they have the same rigor? Would it affect their class rank, awards, scholarships? And will it be looked at positively through competitive colleges and universities?" she asked.

According to Assistant Superintendent Michelle Blaszczynski, the district is not suggesting that virtual classes offer a direct replacement regarding the experience of in-person classes, but are being offered as an option to parents who feel it may be in their family's best interest for their student(s) to stay home for instruction.

"Our online options are credible, reliable courses, but they are not replicating in-person learning," she said.

Blaszczynski said several courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes, do not have online options — unless the entire district transitions to a distance learning plan as what happened this past spring.

"We can't replicate all of our GPS experiences online," she said. "But if a child starts online classes and then they decide it's safe to go back to school, they will seamlessly go back into the classroom. For virtual classes, a student's transcript will have a "V" on it for virtual, which is typical. It is looked at very favorably by colleges and universities because everyone is very understanding right now."

Board of Education President Norice Rasmussen said she believes whatever health situation is presented, the school district will have a plan in place designed to best educate students within the parameters of the coronavirus.

"A lot of this is still up in the air and undecided, but we are already working on these concerns and we just need to keep up the communication," she said. "We look forward to some resolution in the future, though that might be ever-changing in the next few weeks. This is a time of unknown, but the school district has been working very diligently on these plans. We look forward to hearing from the committee to see where we are headed."

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Wednesday, July 15, 2020



Lakeview Community Schools Superintendent Kelly Nielsen makes her first report to the Board of Education on Monday as the district's new superintendent. — DN Photo | Karen Bota

Lakeview school board welcomes new super

KAREN BOTA
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LAKEVIEW — The new Lakeview Community Schools superintendent attended her first official school board meeting Monday night, and it was a short one.

Kelly Nielsen and board members wore masks throughout the 20-minute meeting, at which board members quickly approved eight items of business and adjourned.

"I'd like to thank you for wearing masks," Board of Education President Ed Jonaitis said. "I understand it is a governor's order that we probably need to cooperate with, so thank you."

Nielsen gave her report to the board, which included a building report, but she noted that the data was from August 2019 to March 2020, when schools closed for the year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Coming from the elementary school, I noticed there were some heightened behaviors," she said. "One new component this year for all buildings was a check-in and check-out system ... for kids that just need a touchstone with someone to see how their days are going at the beginning, give them a little encouragement, and then again at the end of the day they go over their daily progress note."

Nielsen told board members that, since July 1, she has been "eyeball deep" in the "MI Safe Schools Return to School Roadmap," reviewing the different phases Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has outlined for what a return to school could look like.

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Lakeview school board welcomes new super

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"It's changing daily," Nielsen said. "We are now in phase four. Phases four, five and six allow students to return to an on-campus environment, although the requirements and restrictions are different at the different phases. Phases one through three would be complete virtual. We've been asked to look at the scenarios and make plans."

Nielsen has been meeting with building administrators and the technology department, which is now contracted with the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District, representatives from Dean Transportation and the facilities director.

"We are looking at the requirements from the phases to see what they might look like," she said.

Nielsen also has begun attending the meetings of Montcalm County superintendents, which have been helpful in planning how to move forward, she said. She will meet with the health department today.

In preparation for the start of the new school year, Nielsen said she sent out a staff survey this week.

"We started in the middle of May with preplanning, but there were so many questions, it was tabled," she told the board. "From July 23 to July 30 we'll be setting up building meetings to start looking at barriers and how we can problem solve through them."

Nielsen said professional development plans to support virtual learning have been sent out to staff, as well as safety and sanitation modules, so they have "more of an opportunity to be prepared."

School is slated to start before Labor Day, "unless we are told differently," she noted.

Board members took action on the following items:

- Approved a contract for Business Manager Tricia Root to consult with the Carson City business manager.

- Approved administrative and salaried personnel contracts, which Jonaitis noted were "quite standard."

- Approved revised policies as presented to align

with state verbiage.

- Approved changing a special education paraprofessional at the high school to a general education paraprofessional.

- Approved changing a special education paraprofessional at the middle school to be assigned as a one-on-one aide.

- Approved building handbooks for the 2020-2021 school year. Nielsen said building principals may have changes "down the road" if school becomes virtual rather than face-to-face.

- Approved the free and reduced lunch prices for the 2020-2021 school year.

- Approved adding two hours each to two at-risk paraprofessional positions to supervise lunches and recesses. Nielsen called the proposal a "win-win, getting folks extra time and guaranteeing we have coverage as well."

The next Board of Education meeting will be 7 p.m. Aug. 10 at the high school media center.

Mid-Michigan Counties See Double-Digit COVID Case Increases

 Posted on Wednesday, July 15th, 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.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Gratiot and its neighboring counties each saw sizable COVID-19 case increases over the past week, but few deaths.

As of Tuesday, Gratiot's cumulative COVID-19 case count jumped up by 11, bringing the total to 97 cases. A resident of Masonic Pathways in Alma who was over 100 years old passed away from COVID-19 this week, bringing Gratiot's COVID-19 death toll up to 14.

Gratiot County accounts for more than half the total COVID-19 deaths in the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) region, and 12 of those 14 individuals were residents at local nursing homes.

Elsewhere in the MMDHD, no new deaths were reported. Montcalm County gained 15 new cases for a total of 120, and is still reporting one death. Clinton County spiked with 31 new cases for a total of 245, and is still reporting 12 deaths.

In Isabella County, 25 new COVID-19 cases were identified over the past week, bringing their case count up to 139. Isabella is still reporting 8 deaths. And in Midland County, 14 new cases were identified, and 9 deaths are still being reported.

Cases spiked in Saginaw County, with 123 new cases and one new death being reported over the past week. Saginaw's cumulative case count is now 1,361, and 122 individuals in that county have passed away from COVID-19.

As of Tuesday, Michigan as a whole is reporting a cumulative total of 70,306 positive cases and 6,081 deaths. One of the new COVID cases Gratiot gained over the last week is an employee at Warwick Living Center in Alma. Vicky Johnson, chief marketing officer of the Michigan Masonic Home, said that they were notified of the positive case on July 8.

The employee is currently self-isolating at home, and no other employees or Warwick residents have tested positive at this time, Johnson said.

Routine testing is being done at Michigan's nursing home facilities. Gratiot County is grouped with Clinton, Shiawassee, Eaton, and Ingham as a part of Michigan's Region 5, which has been identified as a high-risk region since June 29. Because of the high-risk designation, Johnson said that all staff must be tested weekly.

Warwick Living Center is one of two Michigan Masonic Home campuses in Alma. The other, Masonic Pathways, currently has 12 residents still testing positive for COVID-19 and one employee self-isolating at home. Johnson said that it has been six weeks since any new cases were identified at Masonic Pathways. Johnson said that the staff at Pathways and Warwick have "worked diligently" to follow all guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and the executive orders of the governor to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"We are very proud of our team in their tireless efforts to protect and provide care to our residents during this very difficult time."

As the pandemic persists, all residents at Masonic Pathways and Warwick Living Center — over 300 in total — are screened daily for COVID-19. The over 500 employees at the facilities are screened at each shift, and anyone exhibiting COVID-like symptoms is "immediately quarantined" until they test negative.

GRATIOT COUNTY

Officials: Virus spike from community spread

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

A spike in COVID-19 cases in Gratiot County started with community spread that ended in small household clusters, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department said.

On July 5, 89 confirmed cases were reported in Gratiot County. By Friday, that number was 97.

“The increase in cases in Gratiot County is due to community spread, mainly within households where a few cases turn into many,” said MMDHD spokeswoman Leslie Kinee in an email.

Community spread is a phrase that generally means an infection for which no obvious source, such as an infected relative or coworker, can be identified. The precise definition is generally left to individual health departments.

The additional cases was enough to push the county into the medium-high risk category in terms of new cases. The seven-day average, as of Saturday, was 27.8 cases per million people. The thresholds for medium-high are between 20 and 40 cases per million people.

In terms of positive test results, the county remains low risk, at 2 percent. The threshold for medium risk is at 3 percent.

None of the cases came from the July 4 party at Isabella County’s Littlefield Lake, where so far 11 additional cases have been confirmed.

Of those 11, 10 were Isabella County residents, said Steve Hall, health officer for Central Michigan District Health Department.

The other person was from Ingham County. No information was immediately available whether

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that person had gone on to infect other people.

Until last week, the biggest increases in Gratiot County's cases were centered on two nursing homes, the Jack F. Saunders Health Care Center of Masonic Pathways, of Alma, and Riverside Health Care Center, of St. Louis. Between residents and staff, the two account for 54 confirmed cases of the disease and 10 of the county's 14 deaths.

Some of those cases are likely tallied in other counties, however. Infected people are tallied by county of residence, so a nursing home employee who lived in Mt. Pleasant would appear in the Isabella County case count.

Isabella County's confirmed cases increased to 139 on Tuesday, marking the 49th and 50th new cases in 30 days. No information was available whether these were related to the Littlefield Lake outbreak, new cases at Central Michigan University or at the Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort, where three employees have tested positive in the last week and a half.

Asked how many cases are connected to casino properties, Raul Venegas, executive director of marketing, entertainment and sales, replied, "I have no comment."

Eight people in Isabella County have died of COVID-19, at least five of them

associated with two nursing home outbreaks.

Another 584 cases were announced Tuesday afternoon by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and another six deaths.

During much of June, the state was announcing fewer than 300 cases a day. That started to creep up again as the state reopened more things. At the height of the outbreak, in the middle of April, the state was announcing more than 1,000 new cases a day.

The number of deaths, on the other hand, is much lower in ratio to the number of cases. For much of April, the death rate hovered right around 10 percent.

With fewer deaths per cases, the state's overall death rate has fallen to 8.8 percent. It is expected to continue decreasing since testing resources early on were reserved for people in groups at greater risk of dying from the disease. On the other hand, hospitalizations and deaths lag behind new confirmed cases by as many as three weeks.

In the rest of mid-Michigan, two additional cases were reported in Clare County for a total of 33, with three deaths; one additional case was reported in Montcalm County for a total of 120, with one death; and five more cases in Midland County for 145 cases, with nine deaths. Mecosta County, with 36 cases and two deaths, and Gladwin County, with 28 cases and one death, both remained unchanged from Monday.

Daily News

Thursday, July 16, 2020



The Stanton City Commission looks at an outdoor dining request from a restaurant and the permit application the restaurant owners will have to fill out during Tuesday's meeting. Pictured, from top left, are City Commissioner Ray Holloway, Mayor Lori Williams, commissioners Mary Thomas, Vladimir Edelman, Michael Mazzola, Charles Miel, Jane Basom and Kevin Koster of Prein & Newhof. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

Stanton City Commission considers restaurant's outdoor dining request

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STANTON — Those living in or visiting Stanton may soon have the opportunity to dine outdoors at one of the city's restaurants, pending the City Commission's approval.

During Tuesday's meeting, City Manager Vester Davis told commissioners that a restaurant in Stanton had expressed interest in setting up chairs and tables to create an outdoor dining area for customers.

"Looking through our zoning ordinance, outdoor dining is permitted in the central business district," Davis said. "Near the end of the paragraph that talks about outdoor dining, it does say that permits and requests must be approved by the City Com-

mission."

Being unable to find any blank applications in the city files, Davis asked Deputy Clerk Rachael Winnie to come up with a new permit application to send out to the restaurant owners that could be returned to the City Commission at a later date.

"When it comes before you, there will be a packet with information for you to review that talks about the number of chairs, number of tables, distance from the curb, what type of cuisine, if they're going to be requesting to serve alcohol, etc.," Davis explained. "More often, it's a more involved process when it comes to alcohol, but if they're just eating and having regular beverages, this is an opportunity for one of our

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Stanton considers restaurant's outdoor dining request

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local businesses to expand their footprint a little bit and have additional seating.”

Regarding the topic of alcohol, Davis said the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (LCC) regulates that area of request from restaurant owners.

“(The LCC) typically checks with the local unit of government to see if there are special conditions or regulations they’d need to adhere to, first, before even applying,” he said. “Most bars or restaurants that serve alcohol know that there’s a set of rules they have to comply with, and they’d be reiterated to the applicants.

“There has been some new legislation that passed due to COVID where they’re changing a few of those laws and making a few exceptions, but that’s all regulated by the state when it comes to serving alcohol outdoors.”

While Commissioner Jane Basom wondered if the Planning Commission had to be involved with the process, Davis said it could be solely handled by the City Commission.

“When it comes to the alcohol, we could make a stipulation that they have to have approval from the LCC as well as a show of some type of approval,” Davis said.

Commissioner Ray Holloway also suggested seeking approval from the Mid-Michigan

District Health Department.

“I know they’re really busy because of the COVID, but there are concerns about birds flying over when someone’s eating, contamination of food and sanitization,” he said. “I’d reach out to them and ask about all of that.”

Holloway said he’d love to give the restaurant an opportunity to offer outdoor dining, but there were a few other areas he thought should be addressed in the application.

“If they’re going to serve alcohol outside, there’s always a chance of some kind of disagreement coming up,” Holloway said. “The only other caveat I had, I don’t think they should exceed the amount of patrons that are allowed inside the building. I know that, right now, they have to cut back on their seating because of COVID. I think we should limit them to the occupancy stated inside the building in case there’s weather or some kind of emergency that came up and people had to get inside.”

Commissioner Charles Miel felt this was perhaps giving restaurant owners too many hoops to jump through.

“We’re Stanton,” Miel said. “I don’t understand why we have so much trouble doing something little like this. I think the form is appropriate to approve. Put in there that it needs the compliance of the LCC and let them go at it. If the health department doesn’t like it, they can come down and cover-up the area from

birds. Every outdoor place in the world has those problems. I don’t think we need to get the Planning Commission or health department involved in anything.”

“And you’re on the Planning Commission, huh, Chuck?” Holloway retorted.

“I know it, but it’s one more step in the way,” Miel responded. “We’re a small town. We don’t need to have four steps of something just to get permission.”

Holloway believed the City Commission should strive to do things correctly the first time precisely because Stanton is a small city.

“I’m not saying we should do anything wrong the first time,” Miel said. “I’m saying that the ordinance says they only need the City Commission’s approval. It doesn’t say anything about the Planning Commission, so why do it?... We’re giving them permission to serve the same food outside as they’re doing inside. I don’t see why that should be a big problem. You’ve got a table outside, serve your food.”

Mayor Lori Williams suggested adding a line onto the permit requesting that the restaurant owner provides copies of related documentation and approval from the LCC and health department.

“This was a quick turn-around with the request, so if that’s additional information that’d make everyone a little more comfortable, we can definitely do that,” Davis said.

Daily News

Friday, July 17, 2020

Health dept. eliminates water quality program due to coronavirus pandemic

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STANTON — An environmental health educator who was recently hired to do water quality work for a three-county area has become one of the casualties of coronavirus-related budget cuts.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham provided a budget update for the 2020-2021 fiscal year during a special Board of Health Finance Committee meeting Wednesday. The health department covers the area of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties and the Board of Health is comprised of commissioners from those three counties.

“We have notified the counties that we can’t do the water program anymore because of COVID-19,” Cheatham said. “Once that is behind us in a year or two we will address that but right now we just don’t have the bandwidth to do that.”

Cheatham was referring to an environmental health educator the health department hired last year to address water quality issues in the three-county area — including assisting homeowners with failed septic systems, helping municipalities establish sewer systems and monitoring swimming areas for E. coli. The position was previously titled “water quality specialist,” but that name was later changed to be more all-encompassing.

Cheatham told the Daily News that position has been eliminated from the proposed 2020-2021 budget, but the person who was



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Administrative Services Director Melissa Selby, at upper right, gives an update on the health department’s anticipated budget, as Montcalm County Commissioner Adam Petersen, upper left, and Health Officer Marcus Cheatham, below, listen during a special Board of Health Finance Committee meeting Wednesday. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

hired for that position will be able to fill another vacancy within the health department.

“We haven’t been able to do the water quality work we wanted to since all our staff are working on COVID now,” Cheatham told the Daily News. “We just told the counties honestly that we wouldn’t be able to do the work and withdrew our request for funding for that position.”

Montcalm County is being asked to appropriate \$430,674 for health department services for the upcoming fiscal year while Clinton County is being asked to appropriate \$397,568 and Gratiot County is being asked to appropriate \$287,263.

Health Department Administrative Services Director Melissa Selby noted that these numbers indicate a \$3,711 decrease for

Clinton County, a \$2,743 increase for Montcalm County and a \$968 increase for Gratiot County from on last year’s numbers. These changes are all based on local service trends.

Cheatham told the Daily News each of these changes are relatively small in the overall budget scenario.

“Last year Clinton had a big jump and now they’ve come down,” he said. “However, we do know that Montcalm consumes a lot of well and septic work, has a healthy number of restaurants and also more than average families on WIC (the Women, Infants & Children federal assistance program). So if there is something driving this (Montcalm County’s increase), it would be that.”

Montcalm County commis-

sioners are set to have their first budget workshop at 11 a.m. Friday for the upcoming fiscal year where the health department’s appropriation request and other budget requests will begin to be discussed. That meeting is open to the public on the third floor of the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton.

“Even with our (Montcalm County’s) budget I’m just scared about the whole state revenue thing and I’m glad to hear Marcus say the health department will work with us even if we can’t pony up all our dough because we’ve got a lot of other places we’re working to prop up,” Montcalm County Commissioner Adam Petersen said during Wednesday’s Board of Health meeting. “Scary times we’re living in, I guess, as far as money.”

“Just the range of uncertainty is pretty staggering,” Cheatham agreed.

Cheatham also reported that the health department hopes to once again provide screening and vision services to local public schools. The health department won’t be charging schools for these services (they didn’t charge schools this past year either).

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for July 22 with a Finance Committee meeting at 8:30 a.m. and a full board meeting following at 9 a.m. The public may virtually participate in either meeting via Zoom by using meeting ID 990 284 0485 or by calling in by phone at (312) 626-6799 and then entering that same meeting ID number.

ST. LOUIS

CLEANING IT UP



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANE KEON

Above, below right: Clean-up work at the St. Louis Velsicol Chemical Superfund site is ongoing.

More than 115,000 pounds of toxic waste recovered at site

Morning Sun staff

Over 115,000 pounds of a toxic contaminant have been recovered so far by EPA at the Velsicol Superfund Site in St. Louis, officials said last week.

Prior modeling had predicted that the amount to be removed would fill about four tanker trucks.

Instead, 12 tankers have already been filled, with no end in sight.

The contaminant being removed is DNAPL (dense non-aqueous phase liquid). EPA Project Manager Tom Alcamo said this is a very heavy DNAPL.

“Water weighs 8 pounds per gallon, and this DNAPL weighs 17 pounds per gallon,” he said.

To liquefy the DNAPL so that it can be pumped from 30 feet underground, thousands of kilowatts of electricity are applied through heating elements that extend in almost 300 wells.

Once the temperature underground reaches 100 C (boiling), it is held there for at least 90 days. The present cleanup area is about 1.5 acres of the 52-acre former Velsicol chemical plant site.

The EPA's contract with

Cascade, the thermal destruction company, called for the underground heating to cease on July 7.

Alcamo said there has been no reduction in the amount of waste coming up, so heating will continue until they see “diminishing returns.” He added that he has enough money in the budget to continue the process until it is finished. The operation is costing about \$1 million a month.

The DNAPL is comprised of various chemicals, including amale sterilant DBCP (1,2-Dibromo-3-chloropropane).

Alcamo said two “hits” of DBCP occurred in the air at the site in June, and added, “The lesson we learned is to open the weir tanks carefully.”

When the DNAPL is drawn up through the wells, it is accompanied by groundwater. Both liquids are pumped into weir tanks where the DNAPL settles to the bottom. Once it has separated out, the DNAPL is then pumped into the tanker trucks.

The trucks transport the waste to EPA-certified incinerators in El Dorado, Ark.



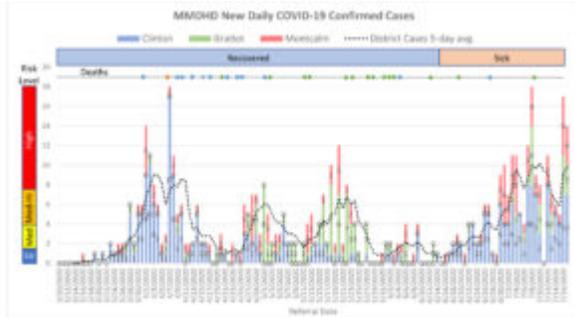
Far left: EPA contractors are removing debris from the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site in St. Louis, including old storage tanks left over from the initial 1980s' cleanup.

Left: Installation of a liner over Area 2 heating area.

COURTESY PHOTOS

By The Numbers: Understanding Local COVID-19 Data

 Posted on Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020 and is filed under [FEATURE](#), [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.



This graph, provided by the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department, displays the laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases in the jurisdiction by day. Cases are depicted as bars on the graph, and deaths are indicated by dots at the top of the graph. Cases and deaths are color-coded by county. The bar on the left side indicates how cases correspond to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services's risk levels. The district cases five-day average, indicated by the black dotted line, indicates what risk level the district is in at each point in time. The bar across the top of the graph distinguishes the cases that have most likely recovered from the cases that are most likely still ill with COVID-19. It uses an algorithm that is used by most states.

By Emma Selmon Herald Staff Writer

It's not too difficult to find data about COVID-19 in Gratiot County. A wealth of information is available online from both the local health department and the State of Michigan.

But for a lot of people, understanding the COVID curve is —well, less than straightforward.

Learning how the health department tracks and reports COVID-19 cases in the area can help residents get a sense of how COVID is spreading in their communities — and what the risk is in their area.

COVID-19 data by county can be found on both the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) website and the State of Michigan Coronavirus page. The MMDHD updates their website twice weekly, while the state updates their pages every afternoon.

In both places, you can find the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths by county. The number of cases is a cumulative count of all positive viral COVID-19 tests since the pandemic hit in March, said Marcus Cheatham, MMDHD health officer.

In Gratiot, as of Tuesday, that number is 109. This number represents all Gratiot individuals who tested positive for a COVID-19 viral test, meaning they were carrying the disease at the time they were tested. Cheatham said the number does not include any individuals who may have tested positive for a serology test, or antibody test, meaning they had previously carried the disease at the time they were tested.

The 109 also does not include presumed, or probable, COVID-19 cases. Probable cases are individuals with COVID-19 symptoms who have an epidemiological link to a confirmed COVID-19 case, but who have not been

tested. While some health departments combine these numbers with the confirmed cases, the MMDHD reports them separately.

As of Tuesday, 11 individuals in Gratiot have been identified as probable COVID-19 positives. If the probable and confirmed cases were to be combined, Gratiot would be reporting 120 cumulative positive cases.

While the cumulative case count indicates the total impact that COVID-19 has had on an area so far, it does not reveal the current impact of the disease.

The current impact is something that's difficult to exactly quantify, even for the experts. This is partially because not everyone experiences the disease in the same way. Some individuals never show symptoms, some show mild symptoms and recover quickly, and some can be severely ill and continue to test positive for several weeks.

Cheatham said it's "almost impossible to precisely count" the number of individuals who are currently sick with COVID-19. In order to do that, the health department would "have to evaluate everyone," which would be "time consuming and expensive."

Instead, the health department uses a calculation to estimate about how many people are sick in the county.

"We assume that people who were diagnosed in the past month could still be ill. Everyone else we say has recovered," Cheatham said. "That's not totally accurate but it does give a good feel for what could be going on."

Cheatham said that as of Saturday, only about 24 people in Gratiot are currently ill with COVID-19. Compared to neighboring counties, Gratiot has had "very few" cases — and to keep cases down, people still need to be diligent about preventing the spread.

"If we social distance and mask up we can keep things from getting worse," he said.

While the MMDHD doesn't know exactly how many people are sick or symptomatic with COVID-19, they do know that the numbers are rising.

Cheatham said that Mid-Michigan is "starting to experience an outbreak right now."

"It's not as safe to go out as it was a few weeks ago," he said. That is really bad timing because we want to open the schools and the numbers are moving in the wrong direction."

Detailed COVID-19 information can be found at the both the MMDHD's website, www.mmdhd.org/novel-coronavirus/, and the State of Michigan's website, www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/.

CORONAVIRUS IN MICHIGAN

Gratiot death brings COVID-19 toll to 15

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

A man in his 60s was the 15th Gratiot County resident to die of COVID-19.

The death was announced during the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Tuesday afternoon update. It's also listed on the Mid-Michigan District Health Department's website as part of its information dashboard.

The man was not associated with any of the county's nursing homes, said MDHHS spokeswoman Leslie Kinnee.

Gratiot County has had the most deaths due to COVID-19 of any mid-Michigan. As of Tuesday's update, it had a total of 109 cases and 15 deaths.

Midland County's nine deaths with 715 cases and Isabella County's eight deaths on 162 cases are the next. Another two cases in Midland and one in Isabella were announced Tuesday afternoon.

Cases were rapidly increasing in Isabella County until last week when the rate appeared to slow. On Tuesday, Central Michigan University announced that it had no new cases since July 6. An outbreak at the university infected 15 starting in mid-June. It is believed connected to a mem-

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ber of an academic building's custodial staff.

The vast majority of Gratiot's deaths are associated with two nursing home outbreaks. Seven of the 20 residents of the Jack F. Saunders Healthcare Center at Masonic Pathways died of the disease, as did four of the 16 residents of Riverside Healthcare Center, in St. Louis.

The last few weeks, Gratiot County has seen a rapid increase in the number of cases. At the time, Kinnee said that the county has seen additional cases in household clusters created by community spread. While the precise definition of community spread differs from health department to health department, in general it refers to cases for which no specific source can be found.

In addition the Gratiot's 109 confirmed cases, MMDHS has also monitored a total of 11 probable cases there. A probable

Gratiot's death was one of just five new deaths reported by the state on Tuesday. Four other deaths were announced following a review of vital records.

case is defined as someone who has been in close contact with someone confirmed to have the disease and develops symptoms but that a case is also not confirmed by testing.

Gratiot's death was one of just five new deaths reported by the state on Tuesday. Four other deaths were announced following a review of vital records. Death certificates with COVID-19 listed as the cause of death are matched against the state's COVID-19 case database. Where the state

lists a confirmed case but is not noted as ending in death, the database is corrected and the death announced. A total of 6,135 people have died statewide of COVID-19.

The state announced another 573 new cases Tuesday for a cumulative total of 74,725. In addition to one new case each in Isabella and Gratiot counties, and two in Midland County, one new case was announced in Gladwin, Mecosta and Montcalm counties. Mecosta County has 43 cases and two deaths. Montcalm has 175 cases and one death.

In addition to the new case in Gladwin County, bringing that county's total to 31, the MDHHS announced that its second person had died. The man was an elderly man with underlying health conditions and who was hospitalized in late June, said Steve Hall, health officer for Central Michigan District Health Department, in an email.

Clare County, with 37 cases and three deaths, remained unchanged.

GRATIOT'S CASES TOP 100

 Posted on Wednesday, July 22nd, 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.

COVID-19 DEATHS NOW AT 15

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Counties in the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) jurisdiction once again saw double-digit increases over the past week.

Gratiot County gained 12 cases and is now reporting a total of 109 cases as of Tuesday. Gratiot is also reporting one more COVID-related death over the past week. The individual was a man in his 60s, and was not associated with any long-term care facility, according Leslie Kinnee, MMDHD public information officer.

Gratiot's COVID-19 death toll is now 15. Of those individuals, only three were not associated with a longterm care facility.

While Montcalm and Clinton counties are not reporting any new deaths this week, the two other MMDHD counties have seen larger case increases. Montcalm County gained 21 cases over the past week and is now reporting 141 cases and one death. And Clinton County gained another 31 cases, and is reporting a total of 276 cases and 12 deaths.

Gratiot's other neighbors also saw large increases, but no deaths. Isabella County gained 23 cases over the past week for a total of 126 cases and eight deaths. Midland County gained 30 cases, and is now reporting 175 cases and 9 deaths. And in Saginaw County, 152 new cases were discovered over the past week, bringing their total to 1,513 COVID-19 cases and 122 deaths.

As of Tuesday, the state of Michigan is reporting a cumulative total of 74,725 cases and 6,135 deaths.

CORONAVIRUS IN MICHIGAN

Clare sees single-day biggest uptick in cases

Four new infections represents 10 percent of confirmed county total

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
@ebaerren on Twitter

Clare County saw its single-day largest increase of COVID-19 cases on Thursday. At four, the number isn't large compared to more populated communities, but it also represents 10 percent of the county's total number of confirmed cases.

The county now has 41 cases, with three deaths. Central Michigan District Health Department is also reporting 21 of those cases as recovered. While the definition of recovery — 30 days after onset of symptoms without a case resulting in death or continued hospitalization — is imprecise, that means that nearly half of the county's cases have come in the last month.

Unlike other mid-Michigan counties, Clare County has been spared an outbreak in a nursing home. Nursing home outbreaks have explained past large, sudden increases in cases in Isabella and Gratiot counties.

While there have been a couple of outbreaks of note — chiefly at the Littlefield Lake sandbar party the weekend of July 4 — the major source of recent cases across mid-Michigan are in-home transmissions.

On previous occasions, health officers with CMDHD and Mid-Michigan District Health Department have tied increasing cases in Gratiot and Isabella counties to disease spread within a home.

In-home transmissions are believed a common way for the disease to spread. They occur

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when someone is infected with the disease somewhere else, and brings it home. COVID-19 has an incubation period of between 5-10 days, and people are believed contagious before they begin showing symptoms, making a home ideal ground to pass it around. In-home transmissions were believed responsible for up to two-thirds of cases in New York City dur-

ing that city's terrible outbreak in the spring.

An inquiry sent to CMDHD on whether Clare's four cases come from in-home transmission hasn't received an answer.

In addition to Clare's four, cases increased in other mid-Michigan counties Thursday. They included one in Isabella, for 164 with eight deaths; two in Gratiot, for 109 and 15 deaths; two in Mecosta, for 43 with two deaths; cases are up to 148 with one death, in Montcalm

County, and in Midland, cases are up to 190 with nine deaths.

Gladwin, with 30 cases and two deaths, was unchanged.

Statewide, another 699 cases were announced for a total of 75,947. Another seven deaths were announced, with six as a result of a review of death certificates, for a total of 6,148. Michigan's death rate — known more technically as the case fatality rate — continues to fall and as of Thursday was down to 8.1 percent.

MID-MICHIGAN

Task force to EPA: Help end river re-pollution

Pine River Superfund group asks for 'Emergency Removal Action'

By Linda Gittleman

For Media News Group

After more than \$100 million was spent cleaning up the Pine River in St. Louis, members of the Pine River Superfund Task Force want to make sure that the river isn't being polluted again.

It appears that more contamination is likely occurring now in the already cleaned riverbed just as the Velsicol Chemical plant site clean up is underway.

To try and stop the pollution spread, members of the task force asked Chairman Jane Keon to write a letter to the district office of the

Environmental Protection Agency asking for an "Emergency Removal Action."

"Most recently in a conference call with EPA personnel they confirmed that it was likely that NAPL was polluting the river on the west side of the plant site," she wrote.

NAPL (or nonaqueous phase liquid) is the nasty stuff composed of various kinds of toxic chemicals.

"They then reassured us that the EPA Emergency Removal Program would be triggered

The task force has a largely successful track record of getting what it needs and decades long experience in dealing with government agencies.

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River

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with evidence of contamination” she continued in the letter.

But when members asked about monitoring programs that would trigger the Emergency Removal Program, EPA employees said no monitoring was taking place.

“Both our Task Force and EPA agree that a recontamination of the Pine River after almost \$100 million was spent to clean up 32 acres of highly polluted river bottom is to be avoided,” she wrote.

So she asked for monthly sampling of the river, ground water and river sediment to begin immediately.

And she asked for the Emergency Removal Action to begin to stop the contamination into the river.

But will the EPA do as asked?

Maybe not overnight, Keon said.

But both she and Dr. Ed Lorenz, retired Alma College Professor and task force member, agree that, “We are persistent.”

The task force has a largely successful track record of getting what it needs and decades long experience in dealing with government agencies.

Besides, Lorenz pointed

out, “an election year is a good time to ask.”

Keon said she believes temporary collection measures could be instituted as have been in the past.

The fact that the contamination at the Superfund site seems never ending and much bigger than anticipated is no surprise to the task force.

They — and EPA officials — have learned the hard way not to trust Velsicol records. Lorenz also noted that there is reason to believe that Velsicol may have dumped contaminants from other locations into the St. Louis plant site, because at the time, it was allowed to.

And that begs the question: Just what is in that NAPL?

Keon also questions the EPA’s modeling and said that will be discussed at an upcoming meeting.

Lorenz noted that the St. Louis clean up has taken nearly as long as the chemical plant was in operation.

The cleanup has also already cost millions more than the company paid to the community in the form of taxes and salaries.

And there’s much more remediation to come.

“Today’s children will be paying for the clean up (in taxes) when they retire and so will their children,”

Lorenz said.

Daily News

Monday, July 27, 2020

Health dept. orders fitness center to cease and desist

Fresh Start Fitness has been
open since mid-June

ELISABETH WALDON
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GREENVILLE — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department has sent a cease and desist letter to a Greenville gym, which continues to operate despite Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive order.

Fresh Start Fitness, a 24/7 gym located at 406 S. Lafayette St., closed its doors March 16 after an executive order from Whitmer due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nearly three months later, Fresh Start Fitness owner Christopher Reisner decided to do a "soft open" of his workout facility on June 10 — allegedly in violation of Whitmer's executive order. Fresh Start Fitness officially opened

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Christopher Reisner, the owner of Fresh Start Fitness in Greenville, reopened his gym on June 10 and has remained open ever since despite Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive order. He posted this photograph on his personal Facebook page on June 16 after receiving the first of what would be 20 misdemeanor citations issued by the Greenville Department of Public Safety. "We did it — ticketed — patriots unite!" he wrote. — Facebook photo

Fitness center

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its doors on June 15 and has remained open to members every day since.

The Greenville Department of Public Safety (GDPS) began issuing misdemeanor citations to Reisner with a possible penalty of \$500, but Fresh Start remained open. After issuing 20 citations to Reisner, police stopped, as GDPS Director Dennis Magirl said the number of citations were "overburdening the court system."

Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham told the Daily News in mid-July that fitness centers are considered by health experts to be a potential high-risk area for the coronavirus to spread, but he said the health department was not in a position to take any action against Fresh Start.

However, on Wednesday, Cheatham issued a "public health warning notice" in the form of a letter to Reisner. Cheatham cc'd the letter to Greenville City Manager George Bosanic, Montcalm County Prosecutor Andrea Krause and Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel.

"The Mid-Michigan District Health Department has confirmed that Fresh Start Fitness is open for business and admitting clients into the facility at the above address," Cheatham's letter stated. "This is a violation of emergency order 2020-110 and we are ordering you to cease and desist operations. To comply with this order, you must completely close the facility to the public and to your members by Sunday, July 26, 2020. Be advised that if you fail to comply with this directive or any others presented to you by the health department, a court order will be sought to compel your compliance in accordance with MCL 333.2451 and 333.2453."

Fresh Start remained open as of Saturday afternoon when the Daily News called seeking comment from Reisner.

Reisner, who is scheduled to appear in Montcalm County District Court on Aug. 6 regarding the citations, did not return a message seeking comment for this story, but he has previously stated he does not believe he is breaking any laws, adding he is not at liberty to speak on the specifics of the case.

Reisner posted a copy of the health department's letter on his personal Facebook page on Thursday and wrote, "When does it stop?"

Daily News

Monday, July 27, 2020

Health officials talk return to school

CORY SMITH

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STANTON — Looking less than a month into the future, Dr. Jennifer Morse is hopeful for a scenario in which students will be seated in classrooms under the instruction of teachers — safely — in a country struggling to reopen amid the coronavirus pandemic.

With proper procedures in place — students and teachers wearing masks, lunches in classrooms, mandatory sanitizing before boarding a school bus — Morse, the medical director of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), is optimistic the 18 school districts within Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties can reopen for the 2020-2021 school year as scheduled in August.

What she fears, however, is the current environment of misinformation, which floods the waves of social media on Facebook and Twitter.

Morse paints the picture, imagining a statement from a concerned parent reading, “I just found out my child has COVID,” to be posted directly to Facebook without additional context. The ensuing paranoia, panic and uproar aimed at a school district where the child attends school could unravel all of the efforts made by schools and health departments to return children to school.

“The cart gets ahead of the horse sometimes. People find out someone is sick or has tested positive and there is communication that might be incorrect or incomplete that gets out there and causes a lot of panic and we have to try and undo it,” said Morse during Wednesday’s meeting of the Board of Health. “We’re trying to make sure these schools know what we are going to do, that we’re going to help

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Health officials talk return to school

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them communicate correctly.”

So far Morse has hosted nine webinar presentations for school districts to help their administrations better understand what they need in place to be able to re-open next month.

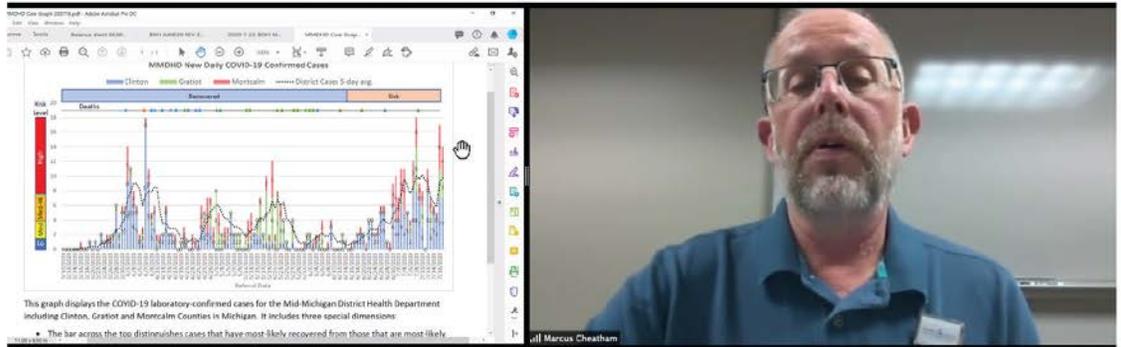
“It’s kind of a tug of war. Some schools are very, very concerned, and rightly so, it’s a very worrisome time,” she said. “We’re struggling with recommendations right now. For example, if a child has a runny nose or a sore throat — which happens a lot — do they have to be excluded from school and tested for COVID every time? How many kids would you have to quarantine whenever someone is sick? Those are things right now that we — a workgroup with several other health officers and medical directors from other health departments — are working on, to come up with consistent guidelines and recommendations.”

According to Morse, children on average are about half as likely to catch the coronavirus compared to adults. However, she said children are more likely to have asymptomatic infections and they are “much more likely” to pass it on to others.

“So really, from what we know so far, it’s the adults in schools that are likely to get COVID, spread COVID and have severe illness from COVID. So teachers are really concerned,” she said. “So we are working on algorithms, processes, and really, trying to develop a nice process so they feel reassured, that it’s going to be OK.”

All school districts are required to develop and submit a “Return to Learn” plan of reopening for the upcoming school year. Those plans must be approved by school board and state officials, and revealed to the public before each school district can reopen.

With Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s “MI Safe Start Plan” consisting of six phases concerning the coronavirus regarding



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham delivers a presentation via Zoom, showcasing trends of positive coronavirus cases and deaths, during Wednesday’s meeting of the Board of Health meeting in Stanton. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

the reopening of the economy, Morse said schools will be walking a fine line as they develop plans that are formed around the phases.

While Montcalm County, within the Grand Rapids Region, is in Phase 4 (improving) of the Safe Start Plan, its coronavirus risk level is currently gauged at Phase 2 (persistent spread).

“There’s two different things going on right now. There’s what’s really happening with the virus and what we are following for economic purposes,” Morse said. “The executive orders show that we are in Phase 4 — that’s what the schools are following still — but we do have some regions that really are in Phase 2 and in Phase 3 (flattening), in terms of how the virus is behaving right now.”

Health Officer Marcus Cheatham echoed Morse’s point about the discrepancy between risk factor and economic phases.

“For large parts of the pandemic we were at medium to medium high risk, and even low, but right now, we’re well up into high,” he said. “It’s (coronavirus) come back. It’s in all three of our counties. We’re up to an average of 10 cases

per day, which is as high as it has ever been. If we were actually implementing economic policies that go along with our risk level, we would be at full-on, stay-at-home, again. We’re skirting the rules to try to keep the economy open and to open schools.”

Cheatham said he understands the importance of opening schools and businesses.

“Dr. Morse has said she feels that we really do need to have kids in school if we can, and we obviously have to keep businesses open,” he said. “That will be able to happen if we can not spread the disease around our community.”

As of Wednesday, according to the MMDHD, the entire three-county region has reported 530 positive cases of the coronavirus since March, with Clinton County reporting 279, Montcalm 144 and Gratiot 107.

Regarding deaths from the coronavirus, the region has reported 28, 15 from Gratiot County, 12 from Clinton and one from Montcalm.

By comparison, the state of Michigan, as of Wednesday, has reported 75,248 total cases and 6,141 deaths.

To help prevent the spread of the virus, Morse said it will be important that schools focus on “cohorting,” keeping groups of students together — and only those groups of students together — throughout the school day.

“If those children are maintained within their group, if someone gets sick, they are now only exposing a certain group of kids,” she said. “If that classroom is always kept together during recess, lunch — everything — then they would be allowed to take their masks off in class. But in the hallway, anywhere else in the school, they would have to wear their mask.”

Regarding sports at the high school level, Morse described that as “going to be a struggle.”

“Sports are very important to a lot of people — there are tons of recommendations being developed for sports — so most schools, they fully intend to have sports. But if someone gets sick, and all of the team goes on quarantine, there goes two weeks of your season. Teenagers are more of a risk in terms of catching and spreading COVID, but they are getting the ‘go’ for sports at this time.”

CORONAVIRUS

Clare COVID-19 surge increases to 10 cases in less than a week

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
Multimedia journalist

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have increased by 27 percent in Clare County in less than a week, continuing a local surge in cases that started in early July.

On Monday, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported 49 cases in the county. Last Monday, that number was 37. The Central Michigan District Health Department is also monitoring three probable cases of COVID-19, according to the MDHHS data dashboard. Up until July 17, the health department was monitoring just one.

Three residents of Clare County have died from COVID-19, and a total of five have been hospitalized.

It's a small number of cases. On the

other hand, with an estimated population of a little more than 30,000, 10 more cases pack a bigger punch than it would in Isabella County, with more than double the people.

Monday, 1.6 people per 1,000 have tested positive for the disease. Last Monday, it was 1.2 people per 1,000.

Last week, Steve Hall, health officer for the Central Michigan District Health Department, said the cases were mostly in-home transmissions of the disease. It is one of the most common ways for COVID-19 to spread, where someone is infected but doesn't know it because symptoms often don't present for days. They bring it into the home and start shedding virus before symptoms develop, infecting family members.

The jump in cases has been enough to push the county's risk level for average number of cases per million resi-

dents into the second-highest category: medium-high. As of Friday, the number of cases per-million in Clare County was 23.3.

Another key indicator — the seven-day average of the percent of tests that are positive — still showed the county as a low risk. The county's seven-day average for positive test percentages is .7, 1.3 percent below the threshold of 3 percent that would push that metric into medium threat level.

Confirmed COVID cases continue to increase across almost all of mid-Michigan, including Isabella County, where two more cases were announced over the weekend.

Isabella County went into the weekend with 167 cases. As of Monday, that increased by two to 169, with 24 probable cases. Eight people have died there and 14 hospitalized, including three

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within the last couple of weeks.

One of their new cases involved someone at CMU, the university announced in its COVID-19 dashboard Monday morning.

Seven more cases were announced Monday in Gratiot County, bringing that county's total to 119, with 15 deaths. Mid-Michigan District Health Department is monitoring 15 probable cases there.

Another 13 cases were confirmed in Midland County, the first mid-Michigan county to breach the 200 confirmed case mark. Cases there stand at 206 as of Monday, with nine deaths. Another 64 people there are considered probable cases.

Three more cases were announced in Gladwin County, for a total of 33 cases and two deaths, with one additional probable case. Four people from Gladwin County have been hospitalized.

Two more cases were announced in Mecosta County for a total of 45, with another five listed as probable. Two people in the county have died.

Four more cases were announced in Montcalm County for a total of 154, with another 18 listed as probable. One person has died of COVID-19 in Montcalm County.

Statewide, another 488 cases were announced statewide Monday for a cumulative total of 78,507, and another five deaths for 6,154.

Daily News

Thursday, July 30, 2020

COVID-19 drive-through test site coming to Greenville

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

GREENVILLE — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) is hosting a free, drive-through COVID-19 testing clinic for the community from 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4, at Baldwin Height Elementary School.

Anyone over the age of 18 will be

able to be tested for COVID-19 during the one-day event. People in high-risk roles are highly encouraged to attend.

Important information to be aware of:

- The test will be available to anyone over the age of 18, even if they have no symptoms.

- No appointment is needed.
- No screening is needed.

- A doctor's order is not needed.
- Please bring a form of ID (a state or country issued ID or paperwork with your name and address (bill, mail or paystub).
- Please bring your insurance card(s).
- This is a drive-through clinic. Everyone will stay in their cars.
- Antibody testing will not be available.

CORONAVIRUS

Isabella camper caught COVID

Individual was among 42 who tested virus-positive in summer camp outbreak

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
Multimedia journalist

An Isabella County resident was one of 42 people who tested positive for COVID-19 after being exposed to a Gladwin County summer camp. More than 230

people could have been exposed to the disease.

Meanwhile, more people have been hospitalized for COVID-19 in Isabella and Clare counties.

The Springs Ministries, 1950 N. M-30, announced that one of its campers tested positive after returning home from the July 12-17

session, according to a post on the camp's Facebook page.

Camp staff were notified on July 22, and subsequently a number of camp staff have tested positive, the post said.

The Central Michigan District Health Department sent out an email to more than 230 people on Monday connected to the July 12-17 and July 19-23 sessions advising them to get tested, said Steve Hall, CMDHD health officer. The number in the email as having

tested positive was 28.

As of Wednesday morning, 42 people associated with the camp tested positive for the disease, Hall said. One of those people lives in Isabella County.

Isabella County's cases increased by two on Wednesday, bringing its cumulative total to 174. Eight people have died of COVID-19 in the county. Another Isabella County person was hospitalized with COVID-19 some time during the last week, bringing

that total to 16, according to the CMDHD dashboard.

Another 10 cases from The Spirits camp outbreak live in the six member counties of CMDHD, which includes Gladwin County. Gladwin County saw a spike of its cases Tuesday, increasing from 36 Monday to 43. Gladwin County's cases remained unchanged on Wednesday. Two people have died there.

None of the positive cases were

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were in Clare County, another CMDHD county, where cases have risen dramatically over the last week. One additional case was announced in Clare County on Wednesday, bringing its total to 51, with three deaths. The number of people who've been hospitalized with COVID-19 in Clare County increased from five last week to six this, according to the CMDHD dashboard.

Osceola, Roscommon and Arenac are the other three counties in CMDHD.

An additional five are in the three member counties of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, said MMDHD spokeswoman Leslie Kinnee, but she said she couldn't get a breakdown on which counties they were in. Gratiot, Montcalm and Clinton counties comprise

MMDHD's geographic boundaries.

Both Gratiot and Montcalm added single cases on Wednesday, bringing Gratiot's cases to 120 and Montcalm's to 120. Fifteen people have died of the disease in Gratiot County, and one in Montcalm.

Another nine cases were added in Midland County, bringing its cumulative total to 220, with nine deaths. One more case was announced in Mecosta County, for a cumulative total of 47 cases and two deaths.

Statewide, another 996 cases were announced, for a cumulative total of 80,172. Due to testing backlog at a commercial lab, 300 of those were old results. Another two deaths were announced for a total of 6,172.

The death rate — more technically known as the case fatality rate — has fallen to 7.7 percent. It was at 10 percent for most of April, May and June.

WIC program makes a difference

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

Each month, more than 200,000 moms, babies and children less than five years of age receive much needed assistance from the Michigan Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

This federally-funded program serves low and moderate income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk.

Participants receive an electronic benefits card (EBT) for purchasing nutritious foods, such as milk, cheese, eggs, fortified cereal, peanut butter, whole grain breads and tortillas, fruit and vegetable juices, fresh fruits and vegetables, and formula at approved retail grocery stores and pharmacies. Participants also receive breastfeeding support, nutrition education, healthcare referrals, health counseling and immunizations. WIC also provides coupons to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets through the Project Fresh program.

WIC has a proven track record of

WIC AT A GLANCE ...

You may qualify for WIC if you live in Michigan and answer "yes" to any of these questions:

- Are you pregnant?
- Did you just have a baby?
- Are you breastfeeding an infant?
- Do you have a child younger than 5 years old (including foster kids)?
- Are you a father or grandparent raising a child younger than 5 years old?

And "yes" to any of these questions:

- Do you, your infant or child less than 5 years old have Medicaid?
- Does a family member receive food benefits, like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/ food stamps?
- Does a family member receive Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits?
- Do you meet the income guidelines? (Posted at mmdhd.org)

demonstrating a positive effect on pregnancy outcomes, and child growth and development. Research shows that the earlier a pregnant woman receives nu-

tritional benefits from WIC, the more likely she is to seek prenatal care and deliver a normal weight infant. For every dollar spent by this program, more than three dollars in subsequent health care costs are saved.

Additional benefits of the program include:

- Higher immunization rates against childhood diseases.
- Lower rate of anemia among children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years old.
- Significant improvement in children's dietary intake of vitamins and nutrients.
- Significant increase in the number of women receiving adequate prenatal care.
- Dramatic decrease in the infant mortality among Medicaid beneficiaries.
- Improvement in weight gain and dietary intake in pregnant and postpartum women.
- Decrease in low birth weight and pre-term births.

To find out if you qualify for WIC, visit www.mmdhd.org or call the Montcalm County branch of the health department at (989) 831-5237.

Child vaccinations down across Michigan

Departments prioritize immunizations for kids

Sarah Lehr Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Fewer Michigan children got vaccinations while the state was in throes of coronavirus-related shutdowns, leaving health officials worried about the spread of preventable diseases like measles, whooping cough and influenza.

Vaccinations have increased since they took a precipitous drop this spring, but numbers are still down significantly compared to 2018 and 2019, according to the state health department.

In June 2020, dosages of vaccines administered through federal or state funding dropped 10% compared to an average combining June 2018 and June 2019, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

That's an improvement over May's 44% decrease and April's 64% decrease compared to the prior two years.

As of June, 53% of Michigan toddlers between 19 months and three-years-old were considered up to date on vaccinations for a host of diseases including chickenpox, polio, measles and hepatitis A. In June of last year, it was roughly 58%.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer ordered a suspension of "non-essential" medical procedures in mid-March with the intention of slowing the spread of COVID-19, a contagious respiratory disease.

Pediatricians: Time to come back for vaccines

Whitmer lifted that restriction in May, but it appears many parents are still avoiding check-ups because of fears of COVID-19 infection. And other parents could be facing a wait list as pediatricians work through a backlog after cancelling appointments earlier this year, said Dr. Jonathan Gold, a pediatrician and an associate professor at Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine.

Plus, guardians may have lost health insurance along with their jobs during a virus-related recession, causing them to



Vaccination numbers are down, health officials say. GETTY IMAGES

put off health care visits, said Dr. Sharon Swindell, president of the Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Families may not be aware of a federal program called Vaccines for Children that covers immunization for uninsured and under-insured children, she noted.

There is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection — yet — but pediatricians and state health officials say it is time for children to go back to their health care providers for other routine vaccinations.

Bob Swanson, director of MDHHS' immunization division, called Michigan's drop in vaccinations this spring "very concerning." Doctors can use an altered dosage schedule to catch up children who are behind on vaccines and the state health department plans to use social media and other resources to remind people to get vaccinated during the pandemic.

CDC has guidelines on vaccinating during pandemic

Guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urge health care providers to give vaccinations during the COVID-19 outbreak while taking certain precautions. That includes requiring face masks for people over two years old and having patients wait in their cars instead of a crowded lobby.

Scientific evidence overwhelmingly points to the efficacy of vaccines, and groups including American Medical Association and the World Health Organi-

"If we let the vaccine rates fall, we are opening up the situation for a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak."

Dr. Sharon Swindell
President of the Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

zation have affirmed their importance.

A small minority of people have medical conditions that prevent them from getting certain vaccines, but, if enough people are vaccinated, herd immunity should protect even vulnerable, unvaccinated people from disease.

Close to 95% of the population needs to be vaccinated to create herd immunity against measles, which is highly contagious. For a less contagious disease, such as polio, herd immunity is between 80% and 85%.

Immunization rates in Ingham, Clinton, Eaton counties

In Clinton County, 53% of toddlers in late July were up to date with a list of vaccines including hepatitis A, a decrease of 3% since a year ago, according to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department had closed its vaccination clinics in March because of Whitmer's order, but reopened them in June, making it a "top priority to get infants through adolescents caught up on any vaccinations they may have missed," spokeswoman Leslie Kinnee said.

In Eaton County, 53% children between 19 and 35 months were fully up to date with their vaccines including hepatitis A compared to 47% in Ingham County, according to the most-recent numbers provided by local health departments.

MDHHS plans vaccine push

"If we let the vaccine rates fall, we are opening up the situation for a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak," Swin-

dell warned. "We don't want a measles epidemic adding to the COVID epidemic. We don't want a whooping cough to start circulating on top of everything else."

The approach of flu season is a major concern and the state health department is planning a campaign this fall to encourage influenza vaccinations. An onslaught of flu cases could overwhelm hospitals, making it difficult for the health care system to devote resources to the novel coronavirus. Some flu symptoms, such as fatigue, fever and coughing, overlap with COVID-19 symptoms, which can complicate diagnosis, Gold said.

It's not clear how many Michigan schools will be holding classes in person this fall, but, even if kids are not gathering in classrooms, they could easily transmit vaccine-preventable diseases to each other in settings such as day cares and play dates, Gold said.

Children enrolling in Michigan schools and child care centers need to either get vaccinated or obtain a waiver citing their medical, philosophical or religious reasons for not doing so.

Parents still need waiver to opt out of vaccines

Because of a 2015 policy, Michiganers seeking non-medical waivers must first attend a consultation with their county health department about the importance of vaccines. The policy, which made it more difficult to opt out of vaccines, led to an increase in Michigan's immunization rates.

The Department of Health and Human Services has not suspended its waiver requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic, but a vaccine consultation would not necessarily need to happen in person, Swanson said. The Ingham County Health Department, for instance, offers telehealth appointments.

Swindell, who has practiced pediatrics for nearly 30 years, urges parents to reconsider opting out.

"I would often say to my patients, 'If there's one thing I could do it would be vaccinate your child,'" Swindell said. "Vaccines have been so effective at protecting children from a number of infectious diseases that used to kill them or cause significant illness."

Greenville gym owner hires Owosso barber's attorney

ELISABETH WALDON
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GREENVILLE — A Greenville fitness center owner who refuses to close his gym has hired the same attorney who represented an Owosso barber who refused to stop cutting hair in defiance of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

Christopher Reisner owns Fresh Start Fitness, a 24/7 gym located at 406 S. Lafayette St. Reisner closed his gym on March 16 after an executive order



David Kallman

from Whitmer due to the coronavirus pandemic, but he reopened to members on June 10 and has remained open since — despite receiving 20 misdemeanor citations from the Greenville Department of Public Safety.

Reisner has previously told the Daily News he does not believe he is breaking any laws, adding that he is not at liberty to speak on the specifics of the case.

Reisner has now hired attorney David Kallman of Kallman Legal Group in Lansing. Kallman represented Karl Manke, the Owosso barber who also defied Whitmer's executive order. The Michigan Supreme Court ruled in early June that Manke had the right to continue operating his business.

Kallman and Montcalm County Prosecutor Andrea Krause conferred via phone for a pre-trial Tuesday afternoon in Reisner's case. Krause said the case is currently in the process of being scheduled to go to trial.

Kallman could not be reached for comment Tuesday by the Daily News.



Christopher Reisner, the owner of Fresh Start Fitness in Greenville, reopened his gym on June 10 and has remained open ever since despite Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive order. He posted this photograph on his personal Facebook page on June 29 after receiving three of what would be 20 misdemeanor citations issued by the Greenville Department of Public Safety. "With the full armor of God! Patriots unite — 3 tickets to kick off the week!" he wrote. — Facebook photo

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department sent a cease and desist letter to Reisner on July 22. The "public health warning notice" was written by Health Officer Marcus Cheatham and he cc'd the letter to Greenville City Manager George Bosanic, Montcalm County Prosecutor Andrea Krause and Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel.

"The Mid-Michigan District Health Department has confirmed that Fresh Start Fitness is open for business and admitting clients into the facility at the above address," Cheatham's letter stated. "This is a violation of emergency order 2020-110 and we are ordering you to cease and desist operations. To comply with this order, you must completely close the facility to the public and to your members by Sunday, July 26, 2020. Be advised that if you fail to comply with this directive or any others presented to you by the health depart-

ment, a court order will be sought to compel your compliance in accordance with MCL 333.2451 and 333.2453."

Fresh Start Fitness has remained open despite the cease and desist letter and the health department has taken no further action at this time.

"We are reviewing our options with regards to enforcing a closure order," Health Department Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock told the Daily News. "We continue to work with our state partners and are committed to reducing the risk of COVID spread in the community."

The Greenville Department of Public Safety began issuing misdemeanor citations to Reisner with a possible penalty of \$500, but after issuing 20 citations to Reisner, police stopped, as Public Safety Director Dennis Magirl said the number of citations were "overburdening the court system."

Daily News

Thursday, August 6, 2020

'I want to know'



From left, Andrew Kluemper, Heather Kluemper and Julia Clark-Brownell of Optimal Medical Staffing perform coronavirus swab tests during a drive-thru testing event Tuesday at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville organized by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Nearly 100 people participate in drive-thru coronavirus testing event in Greenville

CORY SMITH
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GREENVILLE — Parked in her car, with a medical swab being swirled through her nose, Alisha Stacy didn't mind the few moments of discomfort as a nurse collected a sample to be tested for the coronavirus.

"I have had a summer cold the past week, so I just wanted to make sure, just to be safe," the Greenville resident said. "I've had trouble getting tested in Grand Rapids, so when I saw this, it was just amazing."

Stacy was one of 100 people who participated in Tuesday's free, drive-thru testing event in the parking lot of Baldwin Heights Elementary School.

The event, held coincidentally and simultaneously with a similar drive-thru testing station down the street at Spectrum Health United Hospital, was organized by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

According to Health Department Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Hailey Brewer, the event was offered for a variety of reasons.

"One of the reasons why we decided to do this is because Montcalm County doesn't have a lot of testing sites. There are some testing sites, but there are barriers, such as needing a physician's order. Here, you don't need that order, you don't need to see a doctor — anyone can get tested," she said. "The importance of it is, these people that we are seeing, they might be asymptomatic carriers. They could be going to your grocery store, hanging out with your friends, your family, while not actually knowing that they are sick, but they are passing and spreading the virus onto others. This is a great way for us to capture those asymptomatic carriers and get them quarantined so they don't continue to spread it and make the situation worse."

One of those individuals not experiencing any symptoms was Eureka Township resident and Greenville Public Schools elementary music teacher Katy McDonough, who said after turning 60 in March, being a cancer survivor and having extended family members who have tested positive this past spring, she felt compelled to get tested.

"I've traveled to see family and I've worn a mask and tried to be very careful, but we're starting school soon, possibly seeing students in the next month, so I hadn't been tested yet, but I want to know," she said.

McDonough said with her husband, Martin, having asthma and her daughter, Mary, having cerebral palsy, she felt an additional compulsion to get tested.

"I would rather none of us get it," she said. "As a cancer survivor, I'm not technically immunocompromised, but I'm on the borderline."

Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said he was thrilled to see a steady line of cars entering the five-hour event.



Optimal Medical Staffing Director of Nursing Heather Kluemper, left, works with Nurse Supervisor Julia Clark-Brownell to prepare giving a pair of coronavirus swab tests to participants of Tuesday's drive-thru testing event at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville organized by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. — DN Photo | Cory Smith



Greenville resident Alisha Stacy, left, receives a coronavirus swab test from Optimal Medical Staffing Director of Nursing Heather Kluemper during a drive-thru testing event Tuesday at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville organized by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

"In rural areas, it's tough to persuade people to get tested," he said. "We set our goal at 100, and I think we are well on our way to that. We'd love a lot more, but it's really an uphill battle."

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Employees with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department and LynxDx Inc., a private diagnostic company headquartered in Ann Arbor, work together Tuesday to run a drive-thru coronavirus testing event held at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Nearly 100 people participate in testing event

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According to Health Department Public Information Officer Leslie Kinnee, 94 people were tested Tuesday.

As the state has recorded increases in recent weeks in both positive test results and percentages of tests resulting in a positive result, Cheatham said Tuesday's event was an important step in encouraging the public to get tested.

"Right now, this is the worst it's been so far, in terms of COVID spreading. We thought April was bad and that we'd never be back there, but now it's worse," he said. "So we're really encouraging people to get tested, it's very, very important, so we can get out ahead of this thing with contact tracing and prevent it from spreading.

Cheatham said what he most fears is rural hospitals becoming overwhelmed with patients.

"With that, you'll see people dying because they are unable to get medical care," he said. "So many young people, they get this and it's mild, they think it's no big deal, but about 5% to 7% wind up hospitalized. When you take that figure across thousands of people, that would consume most of our hospitals."

Tuesday's testing was handled by LynxDx Inc., a private diagnostic company headquartered in Ann Arbor. LynxDx partnered with nurses from Optical Medical Staffing of Lansing to perform the swabs and collect samples at the event.

"We appreciate the turnout today and the care and diligence people are taking to have themselves tested and ensure that they are healthy," LynxDx Chief Operating Officer Steve Riggs said. "We cannot believe it's been a steady line all day. Our goal is to make sure people are healthy. If we can catch this early, that's less people that are going to be infected."

According to Riggs, the test samples taken Tuesday will take no more than 48 hours to process.

"We actually pre-bar code them and then we process the samples in the lab. We'll scan the barcode, and then the RNA (ribonucleic acid) is extracted," he said. "It goes



Eureka Township resident and Greenville Public Schools elementary music teacher Katy McDonough, left, receives a coronavirus swab test from Optimal Medical Staffing Nurse Supervisor Julia Clark-Brownell during a drive-thru testing event Tuesday at Baldwin Heights Elementary School in Greenville organized by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

through a qPCR (quantitative polymerase chain reaction) step, where we essentially take a very expensive microscope and heater, heat up the agents, and the genes that have COVID will show up on the microscope — they'll actually glow. That will tell us if the person is positive or negative."

According to Heather Kluemper, the director of nursing at Optical Medical Staffing, being tested for the coronavirus is not something the public should fear. Kluemper said two different kinds of tests are typically given at such drive-thru events — a nasopharyngeal swab test or nasal mid turbinate test.

"Today's test was the mid turbinate. We use a cotton swab, and there's a little bit of agitation, five seconds given per nostril, but they were super easy, non-invasive, and everyone has gone away with a smile on their face today," she said.

Daily News

Monday, August 10, 2020

Study finds health risk from Pine River fish

KYLE DAVIDSON | Capital News Service

Anglers are at risk of contracting E. coli while fishing in the Pine River, according to a recent study.

After a state agency determined in 2015 that the Pine River is unsafe for human contact, researchers from Alma College and the University of Toronto began to study the impacts of E. coli on fish in the river. It runs through Mecosta, Isabella, Montcalm, Gratiot and Midland counties between Wheatland and Homer Township.

According to the study, 73% of the fish studied tested positive for E. coli while 88% tested positive for other forms of fecal coliform bacteria.

The study cites agricultural runoff as the primary reason for the contamination. The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (DEGLE) also cites failing septic systems as a major source of E. coli.

According to the Mayo Clinic, E. coli is commonly contracted through contaminated food or water. Common symptoms include abdominal cramping and pain, nausea,

vomiting and diarrhea. Infected children and older adults are also at greater risk of developing kidney failure from a more aggressive strain of the bacteria.

The Pine River is a popular recreation site.

While there is little research concerning E. coli risks from activities like kayaking and canoeing, the new study, published in the journal "Environmental Monitoring and Assessment," singles out angling as a potentially hazardous activity.

That's because fish have a mucus layer with the potential to harbor E. coli, leading to potential angler exposure, it said.

Exposure is likely to occur through cross-contamination while cleaning fish, as well as through oral exposure from unclean hands, the study said.

According to Liz Braddock, the director of the Environmental Health Division of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, no E. coli warnings are posted on the Pine River. The district covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties.

Chris Johnston of Crystal Township, who serves on the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners, said fishing in the Pine River is still common. Among those activities are catch-and-release tournaments for smallmouth bass, which Johnston said typically bring in 10 boats or more.

Johnston said he's thought about the possibility of contracting E. coli from handling fish and uses hand sanitizer while fishing, but doesn't think the bacteria poses a threat for Pine River anglers.

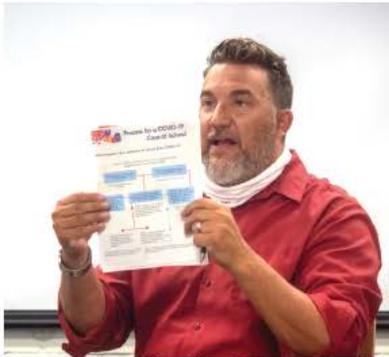
When the researchers tested anglers, they found 50% had E. coli on their hands after the first and last catch of the day.

To avoid infection, Scott Dean, the strategic communications advisor for DEGLE, said the department recommends anglers think ahead. Precautions such as bringing hand sanitizer, avoiding contact with their faces and washing their hands after returning may help prevent infection.

DEGLE also advises the use of clean cooking techniques to prevent cross-contamination.

Daily News

Wednesday, August 12, 2020



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Superintendent John Sattler displays the district's process for dealing with a coronavirus outbreak during Monday's Board of Education meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

CC-C schools ready for 'soft opening' Aug. 24

BRANDON SCHREUR
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CARSON CITY — As Carson City-Crystal Area Schools staff plan to reopen school buildings, Superintendent John Sattler recognizes there are a number of things that could easily change.

"We're going to learn and grow from all of this," he told the CC-C Board of Education on Monday. "We don't want kids to fail. We want constant communication with everyone."

Sattler came before the school board with the district's plan to reopen Aug. 24 — a plan which he says parents already received in an effort to promote transparency.

"The community wanted to hear something," he said. "Our team was working really hard on this plan, but I was very nervous. I didn't want to send something out and then change my mind. I called (Board President Gregg McAlvey) and he told me to send something out right away. Parents need to know. If we have to change part of it, then we have to change it."

As of now, CC-C plans to resume in-person learning Aug. 24 under Phase 4 guidelines. Parents and their students who do not feel comfortable returning have an online option to complete schoolwork remotely from home.

"There are several requirements that go along with the face-to-face instruction," Sattler explained. "We have it mapped out how often we have to clean, what we have to clean with, etc. There are requirements for wearing a mask — who can wear a mask, when they can wear a mask and all those things. There's some sort of vagueness in all of it, but we're trying to figure out what that's going to look like in (Elementary School Principal Alexis Shaver) and (Upper Elementary and High School Principal Doug Hoogerland's) buildings."

One of the biggest concerns the district has been focusing on when it comes

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CC-C schools ready for 'soft opening' Aug. 24

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to in-person learning is the use of face masks.

"The last survey I sent out to parents had a pretty good turnaround on it," Sattler noted. "The survey indicated that 41% said they would not send their kids to school if they have to wear a mask."

Still wanting to comply with state guidelines and create a safe environment for learning, Sattler said the district plans to enforce the use of masks while still promoting education over discipline on the matter.

"I don't want us yelling at kids for not wearing a mask. I want to have a conversation," he told the board. "Talk to them about why we're doing this and why it's important. We can get parents involved, if we have to. If that still doesn't help and a student refuses to wear a mask, we're going to ask that they enroll in the completely virtual online program."

Sattler says both building's cafeterias will also look different, as students will primarily be eating in classrooms.

Several unknowns remain with the current plan, so the district intends to hold a "soft opening" on Aug. 24 and 25.

"We have school on that Monday and Tuesday," Sattler explained. "That Wednesday and Thursday, which were originally scheduled days to have school, we took off. The staff will be in but the students will not."

"The reason for staff to come in is so we can talk about what worked," he noted. "What worked with cleaning, what worked with lunch, what worked with starting the school day, what worked with transportation. What didn't work? How can we make things better?"

Sattler also touched on the possibility that the school potentially could have to switch to Phase 3 (all students required to engage in remote learning) or Phase 5 (face masks no longer mandatory, cafeterias open up more) in the upcoming school year.

"Of course, these phases are done by the governor, as everyone knows," Sattler said. "Right now, Montcalm County is in good shape. However, we're in the same region with Grand Rapids. I think it's kind of stinky for us because we're in pretty good shape. This whole time, Montcalm County has done well as far as COVID deaths and people that have been traced with the virus. The problem is, when you're linked in the same region as Grand Rapids, we could go in a phase that we think isn't appropriate for us but might be appropriate for the entire region."

Should a student or teacher within CC-C test positive for COVID-19, Sattler says there are guidelines and regulations available to view on the district's website.

'MY RECOMMENDATION FOR MOST KIDS IS NOT ONLINE'

Board Vice President Ben Adkins asked whether there was any kind of required commitment period for the students who chose online learning.

"Originally, we came in saying that if you sign up online, you have to stick it out (nine weeks for K-8, a semester for high school students)," Sattler answered. "We did that as a protection for the teachers. We then stepped back to look at it a bit."

"I want to work with parents," he said. "I don't want parents in the fourth week calling saying that their kid isn't doing anything (online) and that they want them back in school, only for us to do nothing about it. I want to work with those parents, so I talked with Alexis and Doug about being more case-by-case with those situations."

According to Sattler, the district in-



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education President Gregg McAlvey, left, and Superintendent John Sattler discuss the district's plan to offer in-person and remote learning for students this fall during Monday's meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

tends to keep a close eye on students working remotely to see how much time they're spending on their work and whether they're understanding the material.

"Lots of kids will say they did their work and really not do anything," he noted. "What we're going to do is look at kids' progress after week two and three and then call the parents for kids who aren't doing anything to recommend they come back to school."

"Let's say someone has an F and they don't want to come back to school because they don't feel comfortable. What's our answer to help keep them from failing?" McAlvey asked.

"When you look on the online sites, you can tell how long they've been (working)," Sattler answered. "If the kid has only been on for 10 minutes in nine weeks, he's going to fail. If he's been on an appropriate amount of time and he's still failing — which usually doesn't happen, but if that's the case — I'd say let's get a tutor or find something to do to help this person."

Sattler also mentioned the possibility of allowing those students to come in during the evenings to meet one-on-one with teachers, should they feel comfortable doing so.

"So, let's say (a student) is in the classroom taking ninth-grade algebra and (another student) is online doing ninth-grade algebra," McAlvey proposed. "After three weeks, are (those students) going to be in the exact same spot?"

Sattler said he was not sure at this time as the district has not yet received the online curriculum material, which differs from the in-person learning curriculum.

"My recommendation for most kids is not online," he said. "If this is about face masks, I'd say, c'mon man, be in school. If this is about serious fear of getting COVID, that's a totally different ballgame. I can't speak for someone's fear. I do encourage parents to check on their students and call the school, even if they're working completely remotely."

"I just want parents to fully understand that if they sign kids up for online, it's not going to be Mrs. Jensen who's teaching the material," McAlvey added. "I just hope that kids and parents know what they're getting into (for online)."

When asked by audience members about why the district doesn't intend to check student's temperatures when entering the building, Sattler said he was using a recommendation from Mid-Michigan District Health Department Medical Di-



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education President Gregg McAlvey asks about how in-person and remote learning will work this fall during Monday's Board of Education meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

rector Dr. Jennifer Morse.

"There are concerns over HIPAA and concerns over false numbers," Sattler explained. "(Morse's) big thing was that she didn't believe it was accurate to determine if it's something more than a kid running around or some other reason to have an elevated temperature. Most schools I've talked to are not doing temperature checks, which is the opposite of what we thought at the end of June."

Instead, the district is encouraging parents to check their students for any signs or symptoms of the coronavirus before sending them to school.

"I think a big challenge is that mental change from a parent and worker standpoint," Sattler noted. "Most people have these middle-class values where if you feel a little sick, you buck-up, take some aspirin and go to work. We have to change, a little bit, on that. Normally, we say we don't want to hear about it (from kids), now go to school. Now we have to say that they might have a temperature and need to stay home."

"I think that home screening is going to be very important and needs to be done honestly," McAlvey added.

After continuing to rigorously discuss the matter for more than an hour, the CC-C Board of Education unanimously accepted the district's return to learning plan, apart from Secretary Nancy Seals, who was absent.

"We should always wash our hands and talk about ways to be safe, but I'd love to get back to talking about academics, improving our test scores and having kids learn," Sattler summarized. "Ways to get them prepared for middle school, high school and college. All those good things."

ST. LOUIS

Cleanup of former Velsicol site ongoing

By Greg Nelson*gnelson@medianewsgroup.com*

The multi-year remediation of the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site in St. Louis has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its Summer 2020 Pine River Progress newsletter, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stated that its “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 a priority,”

Agency officials added that it’s anticipated work on the 52-acre Velsicol parcel “will continue through the COVID-19 response with proper (safety) protocols being followed.”

EPA contractors Jacobs Engineering and Cascade Environmental are providing remediation services at the site.

Work is now taking place on a three-acre parcel called Area 2, where cleanup, using an in-place thermal treatment system, is being done in two phases.

This section of the plant site is where chemicals such as DDT and brominated compounds were produced.

The EPA has already recovered more than 115,000 pounds of contaminants compared to 56,000 pounds that was removed from Area 1, which was used as a dump site where chemicals were deposited directly into the ground.

VELSICOL » PAGE 2



KAYTIE BOOMER — ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

This Jan. 10, 2019, photo shows a view through the fence of the former Velsicol Plant in St. Louis. Cleanup work has resumed at a former chemical plant in central Michigan that's become one of the country's costliest Superfund sites.

Velsicol

FROM PAGE 1

Initially, the agency expected the amount of contaminants recovered from this portion of Area 2 would fill four tanker trucks.

However, it has already filled 12 tankers “with no end in sight,” according to EPA officials.

“This waste is a remnant from a time where minimal regulations allowed for little management of spills and leakage from manufacturing facilities,” the newsletter stated. “But today, after decades of these contaminants in the ground, EPA is getting them out through use of the same thermal treatment technologies that successfully removed contaminants in Area 1.”

Heating of the contaminated soil in Area 2 began in October. It reached the desired temperature of 212 degrees Fahrenheit in April, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Diane Russell stated earlier.

The contaminant being removed is called DNAPL, or dense non-aqueous phase liquid. It weighs 17 pound per gallon, compared to water that weighs eight pounds, according to EPA Project Manager Tom Alcamo.

The Area 2 phase one cleanup is expected to be finished later this summer.

Construction for the second phase will take place through the fall with the startup planned for late spring 2021 and completion anticipated by the end of next year.

The estimated cost of treating all of Area 2 is \$25 million.

Anyone who wants to start receiving copies of EPA's Pine River Progress newsletter can contact Russell at russell.diane@epa.gov.

Work at the site can also be tracked and monitored by going online to www.epa.gov/superfund/velsicol-chemical-michigan.

Greg Nelson is a multimedia reporter at The Morning Sun.

COVID-19



A patron races around the go-kart track at High Caliber Karting and Entertainment last year inside the Meridian Mall in Okemos. NICK KING/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

13 local businesses warned to close during pandemic

Face criminal penalties if they remain open

Megan Banta
Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Local prosecutors and health officials have issued about a dozen cease-and-desist letters to businesses they determined had opened in violation of executive orders issued during the pandemic.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed the first executive order directing businesses to remain closed during the pandemic in March.

Since then, 13 businesses in the Lansing area have received cease-and-desist letters from local officials after opening in violation of that first order or one of the dozens of subsequent orders.

Cease-and-desist letters serve as a warning that the businesses face criminal penalties if they remain open.

Almost all of them have been in Ingham County, where the prosecutor's office and health department both have issued orders.

One order has been issued in Eaton County. None have been issued in Clinton County.

Business credits closure to 'mega Karen'

The Ingham County Prosecutor's Office has given 12 businesses a warning in the form of a cease and desist letter, according to Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Mike Cheltenham.

The county health department has sent a similar letter to one business, spokeswoman Amanda Darche said. That business, Fantasies Unlimited and Club Tabu, received a separate order from the prosecutor but has since been able to reopen.

The most recent business to get a cease-and-desist letter was High-Caliber Karting and Entertainment, a go-



This is the entrance to Fantasies Unlimited and Club Tabu in Lansing on Tuesday. The business was issued a cease-and-desist order earlier this year but has since been able to reopen. MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

The executive order announced at the end of July shuts down indoor entertainment like arcades, bowling alleys, skating rinks and "other similar recreational or entertainment facilities."

karting and entertainment venue in the Meridian Mall.

"Thanks to a mega Karen who's out there somewhere, they shut us down," the business announced in a Facebook post Thursday morning. "Our precautionary measures were no match for government intervention."

The business received a cease-and-desist letter from the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office last week, saying it had violated one of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's latest executive orders.

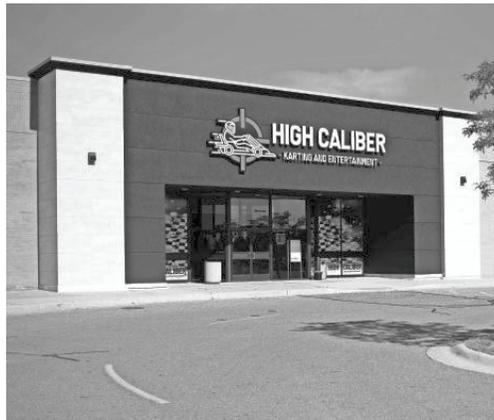
Among other actions, the executive order announced at the end of July shuts down indoor entertainment like arcades, bowling alleys, skating rinks and "other similar recreational or entertainment facilities."

High-Caliber Karting offers various forms of entertainment, including an indoor go-kart track, ax throwing, arcade and a bistro and bar.

The cease-and-desist letter specifically cites the arcade, go-kart track and ax-throwing ranges as recreational activities that fall within the scope of the order.

"While these recreational activities

See **BUSINESSES**, Page 4A



High Caliber Karting and Entertainment in the Meridian Mall received a cease-and-desist letter.

MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Businesses

Continued from Page 1A

are prohibited, serving food and beverages, subject to the conditions of the applicable Executive Orders, is allowed,” the letter dated Aug. 4 reads. “However, all of the recreational or entertainment activities must be closed.”

The entertainment venue first opened late last year in the 80,000-square-foot space within the Meridian Mall that was previously home to Younkers

It closed down in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but reopened at the end of July.

Jordan Munsters, founder and CEO of High Caliber, said in a text message on Tuesday that he’s proud of the steps his team took before reopening to protect guests and employees, which he said were above and beyond what many businesses have done.

Munsters he hopes Whitmer’s office might create a regulatory agency to certify businesses that are reopening, adding he thinks if anyone had thought the pandemic would go on this long, a larger agency like that would already be in place.

The cease-and-desist letter, which Cheltenham said is the first issued under this particular executive order, means another temporary closure.

The letter describes the pandemic as “confusing times for all of us” and calls on everyone to “do our part to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus.”

“We all need to help protect our families, friends, employees, and community,” the letter reads. “Please accept my gratitude in advance for your cooperation in this matter and doing your part to ensure that, together, we can defeat this virus.”

Prosecutors in Ingham County have issued similar letters to 11 other businesses. As of Wednesday evening, the office hadn’t yet provided the full list to the State Journal.

The Eaton County Prosecutor’s Office hasn’t issued any cease-and-desist letters, Prosecuting Attorney Doug Lloyd said in an email.

The Barry-Eaton Health Department has issued one, according to spokeswoman Anne Barna.

The department issued a cease-and-desist letter to Champion Fitness and Boxing in Delta Township on July 3.

Neither the Clinton County Prosecutor’s Office nor the Mid-Michigan District Health Department – which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties – have issued any cease-and-desist letters.

Brian Ameche, the county’s chief assistant prosecuting attorney, said the office was prepared to issue letters but he hasn’t heard of any complaints of businesses not complying with executive orders.

ALMA

FROM THE GROUND UP



PHOTOS BY TIM RATH — ALMA COLLEGE

Shane Henry pulls squash from the Gratiot County Community Garden in this late July photo.

Alma College students meet needs with community garden

Alma College Communications

It's taken a lot of hard work and overcoming obstacles, but the efforts of four soon-to-be graduates of Alma College — along with a host of other volunteers from the community — are starting to bear fruit.

The Gratiot County Community Garden, located in Alma at the corner of Downie Street and Pine Avenue, wasn't easy to put together, according to seniors Mackenzie Hemmer of Wolverine; Shane Henry of Gobles; James Budrick-Diaz of Joliet, Illinois; and Kelsey Johnson of Escanaba. But considering the area on which it stands was merely a vacant city block as recently as this past spring, it's been worth it.

"Giving people who need it access to food and being able to educate them on why that is important is key to this project," Hemmer said. "Maybe there's one thing that you say to them that leaves a good impression and has an impact. That makes everything worth it."

The property, which was

formerly home to Alma Middle School, is used with permission from the real estate development firm Gemini Capital Management of Breckenridge — which is co-owned by Alma graduate Ryan Smith.

Several months ago, Smith approached the nonprofit organization Live Well Gratiot, a subset of the Gratiot County Collaborative Council, with the intent of establishing a community garden at the site. Live Well Gratiot members Alex Montoye '10 and Dale Sanders, who are both faculty at Alma, as well as retired faculty member Ed Lorenz, saw an opportunity for Alma students to give back.

"All of the interns who are organizing the project are from Alma College," Sanders said. "They solicit volunteers and make sure the volunteer schedule is filled. They also solicit donations of materials. They're healthcare administration majors and are doing this as part of their graduation requirements."

GARDEN » PAGE 3



James Budrick-Diaz said the Gratiot County Community Garden is a good example of how readily available produce can improve health education locally.

Garden

FROM PAGE 1

At almost a third of an acre, the garden is currently home to tomato plants, cabbage, lettuce, cucumbers, carrots, zucchinis, peppers, melons, and many more fruits and vegetables. Rows of flowers line the edges of the plots.

Materials were largely donated by businesses and community organizations that have gotten involved; including MidMichigan Health, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, TriTerra, Alma College, the Gratiot Isabella RESD, Bravehearts Pub, Gemini Capital Management, the St. Louis Farmers Market, Child Advocacy, the Gratiot Integrated Health Network, and Fleis & Vandenbrink.

Financial support comes from a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which is designed to benefit communities that do not have access to fresh produce.

Produce from the garden, which volunteers began to harvest in July, has been cleaned and made available to anyone who wants it on a first-come, first-served basis.

Budrick-Diaz, who intends to pursue a master's degree in public health administration from Central Michigan University, said the project is a good example of how nutrition works to benefit the public health.

"If you're not actively searching for and consuming the right foods, it's not going to work out well for you — because unfortunately, the stuff that is bad for you is easy to find," Budrick-Diaz said. "What we're trying to do is make it extremely easy and inexpensive for people to find healthy, delicious food."

Just because the end goal is to make things easy for other people, doesn't mean the garden has been easy for the students.

One of the biggest chal-



TIM RATH — ALMA COLLEGE

Mackenzie Hemmer waters the Gratiot County Community Garden in early July.

lenges in putting the garden together has been keeping it well-watered, especially considering the late June drought-like conditions that struck the region. The block has no access to city water, Hemmer said, and efforts at bringing in water from the Alma Fire Department did not come to fruition. The garden was finally saved by the Alma United Methodist Church, located nearby, which let the group use their water — provided they could string together enough hose to reach between the church and the garden.

"It's about 500 feet away, so it was a lot of hose," Hemmer said. "We have a sprinkler system now, so we don't need quite as much. But for a while, that was a sight to see."

Another challenge has been the travel involved. Hemmer makes a five-hour jaunt from home about twice a week, while Henry treks about four-and-a-half hours biweekly from his home to get the job done. Johnson and Budrick-Diaz are largely able to work from home though, as they specialize in managing the group's social media presence, research, grant writing, and other tasks.

"We didn't have any idea what this looked like before we showed up for the first week of planning," Hemmer said. "This is something you need to be in-person for, but obviously we've been very concerned about everyone's health. So, that part has been hard. We've tried to make the best of it."

Through Facebook, Johnson has managed to coordinate a strong volunteer effort. Her weekly, online callouts have procured dozens of volunteers from all walks of life, mostly based in Alma. She has also helped create relationships with local K-12 school groups and correctional facilities volunteers, who assist with gardening on a regular basis. Kelsey Johnson

"The volunteer response has been really good and we've gotten tremendous feedback from the community in general," Johnson said. "It's easy to see how this is becoming a project for the whole community, not just Alma College students. I'm hearing a lot of people saying, 'Alma needed something like this.'"

According to Henry, the group has been assured two years of use on the site before next steps are decided.

Gemini is on track to begin a residential development on the property within the next year, he said.

Until then, he's thankful for this moment and all it has provided the community — as well as himself.

"Before this, I had no experience gardening or anything like that. It's been amazing to see the response of the community," he said. "To see the plants come up and knowing they're going to feed people who need it, that just feels great."

Montoye said the project is a great example of Alma

College's commitment to partner with the community around it, and the students have served as ambassadors for the college.

"The student interns have made the difference in this project, between it not succeeding and being successful like it is right now," he said. "They were the difference between an empty lot and the vegetables we harvested today. They have taken on ownership, making connections with community partners, soliciting donations and doing big things."

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CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

 Posted on Wednesday, August 19th, 2020 and is filed under [FEATURE](#), [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.



Masonic Pathways resident Bonnie Buchler poses with an “I beat COVID” sign after she tested negative for the virus. Since last Monday, Masonic pathways is COVID-free. (Courtesy photo)



Masonic Pathways resident Linda Rick-Elijah celebrates her victory over COVID-19 with a raised fist. Rick-Elijah is one of twelve Pathways residents who have

defeated the virus since the outbreak began in May. (Courtesy photo)

Masonic Pathways COVID-Free After Remaining Residents Recover

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

After a three-month-long battle with the novel Coronavirus, Masonic Pathways is finally COVID-19 free.

It's a certainly a "relief" for Vicky Johnson, chief marketing officer for the Michigan Masonic Home, but it's not a "permanent fix." Johnson said that the community must continue to be "very, very cautious" and work diligently to keep COVID from coming back.

"The feeling right now is so guardedly optimistic," she said. "We know we have a lot of work to do."

The Alma nursing home announced last Monday, Aug. 10, that the remaining residents who caught the disease had tested negative, and they were allowed to leave the designated COVID-19 floor at the Jack F.

Sanders [Health](#) Care Center.

Since the first case was identified on May 15, a total of 15 total staff members and 20 residents became infected, according information from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). Eight of those residents passed away from the illness, with the final death occurring in mid-July.

By the time the remaining residents tested negative, the outbreak at Masonic Pathways had been contained for nearly two months. Johnson told The Herald last month that no new positive cases had been identified since early June. And since mid-July, there were still 12 residents who were testing positive for the disease.

Now that these residents have beat COVID-19, not too much will change about how Masonic is operating.

Because there is always the possibility that the illness could be brought in again, visitors are still prohibited, Johnson said.

While it's "heartbreaking" that they cannot let visitors come in, Johnson said that the precautions have been effective in protecting the 350-some residents of the Pathways community.

"Everything we're doing is working for us, so we have to look at it that way," she said. "And the families and the residents themselves have been so supportive and so understanding."

Currently, employees are screened daily and tested weekly for COVID-19. And now that the residents are all clear of COVID, they won't need to be tested again unless an employee tests positive, Johnson said.

For the staff, keeping the illness out of Masonic is a 24/7 job: Johnson said that if employees don't take precautions outside of work as well, they could risk becoming infected themselves and bringing the virus into the facility.

But since it's been several weeks since any employees have tested positive, it's clear that "everybody's doing their part," Johnson said.

"Every employee at Pathway's needs to be congratulated on the success that we've all achieved to get to this point where we are today," she said.

The other group who needs to be congratulated is the residents themselves, Johnson said. Despite having been quarantined since mid-March, their attitude has been outstanding throughout these difficult times.

"They have such a wonderful outlook, most of them," Johnson said. "And we all go through our ups and downs — let's face it, this isn't fun for anybody — but the residents as a whole are taking this in stride so well."

And though they can't see their loved ones in person, residents can now receive cards and [letters](#) from friends and family, since restrictions on sending physical items have been lifted. Johnson said that residents "really appreciate" those kinds of gestures, and that "they really do help" keep their spirits up.

Johnson said that anyone who's looking to brighten the residents' day could send a note or a card, or even look into becoming a pen pal. Johnson said that Life Enrichment Coordinator Lisa Godfrey can help community members connect with residents from a distance.

Overall, Johnson appreciates every day that the Masonic community is COVID-free, and hopes that the Gratiot community will continue to do their part to slow the spread and keep everyone safe.

"Gratiot County's not doing bad, and if everybody just continues to wear the face masks and wash their hands, we can continue to protect not only those residents that we have, but the residents that are in the other communities, and Gratiot County as a whole," she said.

School Districts Prepare for Mix of In-Person, Remote Students

 Posted on Wednesday, August 19th, 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.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

With county schools starting up again next week, local students are counting down the final days of their summer vacation. But in the age of COVID, back to school doesn't necessarily mean back to the classroom.

Each of Gratiot's six school districts are implementing flexible return-to-learning plans that allow families to opt for either in-person or remote instruction. And while all of the districts in the Gratiot-Isabella RESD region are moving forward with this unified approach to the 2020 – 2021 school year, each has its own, individualized plan approved by their local school board.

Gratiot's schools are about to open their doors to in-person students for the first time since the pandemic hit, five full months after the abrupt closure in March. Most districts will start classes next week, with Ashley and Fulton beginning on Tuesday, Aug. 25, and Ithaca starting the following day. Alma, Breckenridge and St. Louis will resume classes on Monday, Aug. 31.

All of the back-to-school plans in the Gratiot-Isabella RESD region were designed in accordance with Michigan's Return to School Roadmap, which was released at the end of June by Governor Gretchen Whitmer, the COVID-19 Task Force on Education and the Return to School Advisory Council. These guidelines detail requirements and recommendations for schools throughout each of the six phases of the MI Safe Start plan. For Phases One, Two and Three — “Uncontrolled Growth,” “Persistent Spread” and “Flattening,” respectively — schools are prohibited from providing any in-person instruction. For Phase Four, “Improving,” schools can reopen to in-person education with extensive safety protocols and precautions in place.

Phase 5, “Containing,” allows for the loosening of some of these safety protocols, but it is not until Phase 6, “Post-Pandemic,” that schools can resume operations without any additional COVID-19 safety precautions in place.

As a part of the Lansing region, Gratiot County is currently in Phase Four of the MI Safe Start plan, as is most of the lower peninsula. The two northernmost regions of the state are in Phase Five.

In Gratiot County's schools, all students were given the option to either return to the classroom for in-person instruction or to participate remotely, according to the district superintendents. In all six schools, remote students will be following the same curriculum as their in-seat peers, and in many districts, teachers will have both in-person and distance learners on their class rosters.

Complete information on in-person and remote enrollment for each district was not available by press time, but it would appear that a majority of students are planning to return to the physical classroom. That being said, a significant percentage of students have opted to continue with distance learning as well.

St. Louis Superintendent Jennifer McKittrick said that just over 20 percent of district families have chosen the remote option. In Ashley, about a quarter of students are opting for Virtual Bears, said Superintendent Traci Gavenda. Fulton Superintendent Paul Hungerford said about 30 percent of area families are participating in Pirates Online, and in Alma, a third of the student population has chosen distance learning, said Superintendent Donalynn Ingersoll.

Most schools are allowing families to switch instructional methods at the end of the first marking period or trimester, but in the event that Gratiot County moves backwards to an earlier phase of the MI Safe Start plan, all students will have to be taught remotely. The hybrid model will still be available if the county moves forward to Phase Five.

Students who are enrolled in remote instruction this fall will still have access to school meals, but the programs will not be the same as they were in the spring. Ithaca's Interim Superintendent Sarah Kettelhohn said meals in the district will be available for pickup, and the cost will be the same as it would be in-school.

Alma's Ingersoll explained that meals will no longer be universally available for those aged 18 and under: students must be enrolled in the district to receive meals from Alma Public Schools, which are free for students enrolled in grades PreK – 8. High school students and their families will be charged according to their free, reduced or full pay status.

Fulton's Hungerford said that students participating in Pirates Online will also have to pay for their meals as if

they were in school. The other three district superintendents confirmed that meals would be available for virtual students, but did not provide additional details about the cost.

Students who are returning to the classroom will be met with extensive safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including frequent symptom-screening, hand washing and sanitation. The MI Safe Start roadmap also includes requirements and recommendations about mask wearing for staff and students.

Most districts indicated in their plans while social distancing will be done where “feasible,” they do not have the resources or space to make this a reality in all classrooms.

The districts have been working closely with the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) throughout the planning process for this school year. The superintendents said their schools will follow the protocol provided by the MMDHD in the event that a positive COVID-19 case is discovered.

Overall, the district superintendents have said that their families have been very supportive and understanding throughout this process, and that they are looking forward to getting back to learning — no matter what form. “It is essential for their success to get students back in the classroom, whether the classroom is at home or at school,” said Breckenridge Superintendent Wade Slavik.

Daily News

Thursday, August 20, 2020

Central Montcalm school board meets in person on eve of return to classes

LORI HANSEN | correspondent

STANTON — Meeting in person for the first time since February, the Central Montcalm Public School Board of Education gathered Monday evening — the evening prior to the first day of in-person school — and took steps to approve policies for traditional and virtual teaching.

With hand sanitizing stations set up, directional arrows marking traffic flow patterns on the floors, and bins to deposit used rental masks, the board approved, in a 7-0 vote, an addendum to the Student/Parent handbook to coincide with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive orders.

The board also approved the instruction of all courses listed in the course catalog as traditional/seated courses to be adapted for delivery in a virtual format for the 2020-2021 school year.

"We decided since the staff and stu-

dents are coming back to in-person learning tomorrow, we, as a board, could also safely meet in-person," Superintendent Amy Meinhardt said.

After consulting with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, and seeing the low numbers of COVID-19 cases locally, the district voted to resume in-person schooling, along with offering a virtual program for those students who wish to remain at home.

"We have approximately 390 of 1450 students who will be doing school virtually," Meinhardt said. "That's approximately 30 percent."

Students are asked to stick to that choice until the end of the semester, at which point they can continue to do virtual learning, or come back to the actual school setting. Other parents may also choose, at that time, to change from in-person to virtual, according to Meinhardt.

"I commend the staff and administrators for making changes to get us ready," Board President Bill Simpson said. "There were changes on almost a daily basis, they plan, and then things change again."

"Just because our situation is different, it doesn't mean it is worse, or not as good," board member Jamie Hopkins noted. "It's taking the situation and making sure it is good too."

The board also heard an update from Granger Construction sharing highlights of the ongoing construction project.

Construction manager Jake Stohl said when the crew began work, many businesses were shut down due to the virus, and they are working diligently to catch up.

"We have a few things that are delayed until mid-September or mid-October, then it will be all done by mid-November," Stohl said.

EEE confirmed in Montcalm County horse

Residents and horse owners urged to take precautions

Staff report

LANSING — A 12-year-old mare from Montcalm County has the second case of Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) in Michigan this year.

The case was confirmed on Wednesday by Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) State Veterinarian Dr. Nora Wineland.

Wineland confirmed the state's first case in 2020 in a 2-year-old filly in Clare County on Aug. 11.

MDARD is urging both horse owners and Michigan residents to take precautions in light of the discovery of the second case of EEE, a zoonotic, viral disease, transmitted by mosquitoes to both animals and people.

"This second confirmed case of EEE in a horse reminds Michiganders of the strong need to take precautions to protect

themselves from mosquito bites," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy director for health for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. "It only takes one bite from a mosquito to transmit the virus, which can lead to severe neurologic illness, permanent disability, and sometimes death."

EEE is one of the most dangerous mosquito-borne diseases in the U.S., and the virus is typically seen in late summer to early fall each year in Michigan. While horses are highly affected by the disease, people can also be infected with EEE from the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus.

In humans, signs of EEE include the sudden onset of fever, chills, and body and joint aches. EEE infection can develop into severe encephalitis, resulting in headache, disorientation, tremors, seizures, and paralysis. Permanent brain damage, coma, and death may also occur in some cases.

To protect horses and other domestic animals such as dogs, sheep, and goats, measures could include the following:

- Talking to a veterinarian about vaccinating horses against EEE.

- Placing livestock in a barn under fans (as mosquitos are not strong flyers) during peak mosquito activity from dusk to dawn.

- Using an insect repellent on an animal that is approved for the species.

- Eliminating standing water on the property — i.e., fill in puddles, repair eaves, and change the water in buckets and bowls at least once a day.

- Contacting a veterinarian if an animal shows signs of the illness: fever and stumbling, which can progress to being down and struggling to stand.

To protect yourself and your family, here's what you should do now:

- Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved products, to exposed skin or clothing and always follow the manufacturer's directions for use.

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites.

- Maintain window and door screening

Continues on Page 3

EEE confirmed in horse

Continued from Page 2

to help keep mosquitoes outside.

- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused children's pools, old tires, or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.

- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.

Mosquito-borne illnesses like EEE will continue to pose a risk to both animals and humans until late fall when nighttime temperatures consistently fall below freezing, according to MDARD.

For more information about mosquito-borne diseases, visit [Michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](https://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases).

MID-MICHIGAN

Second horse has Eastern Equine Encephalitis

Morning Sun staff

A 12-year-old mare in Montcalm County is the second Michigan horse to test positive for Eastern Equine Encephalitis this summer, state officials said Wednesday.

The first, announced last week, was a 2-year-old filly in Clare County.

A second case intensifies the need for both horse owners and Michigan residents to take precautions, said Dr. Nora Wineland, the state veterinarian.

EEE is a zoonotic, viral disease, transmitted by mosquitoes to both animals and people. EEE is one of the most dangerous mosquito-borne diseases in the U.S., and the virus is typically seen in late summer to early fall each year in Michigan.

While horses are highly affected by the disease, people can also be infected with EEE from the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus. In humans, signs of EEE include the sudden onset of fever, chills, and body and joint aches. EEE infection can develop into severe encephalitis, resulting in headache, disorientation, tremors, seizures, and paralysis.

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"It only takes one bite from a mosquito to transmit the virus, which can lead to severe neurologic illness, permanent disability, and sometimes death."

To protect your horses



LISA POOLE — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Matt Osborne, field coordinator, Arbovirus Program, Division of Infectious Disease Laboratories at the Massachusetts Dept. of Health State Laboratory Institute sorts mosquitoes collected from Boston according to species for testing as only certain species can carry and transmit the Eastern Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus, in a lab at the institute, Friday, July 6, 2007.

and other domestic animals (such as dogs, sheep, and goats), measures could include the following:

Talking to a veterinarian about vaccinating horses against EEE.

Placing livestock in a barn under fans (as mosquitoes are not strong flyers) during peak mosquito activity from dusk to dawn.

Using an insect repellent on an animal that is approved for the species.

Eliminating standing water on the property—i.e., fill in puddles, repair eaves, and change the water in buckets and bowls at least once a day.

Contacting a veterinarian if an animal shows signs of the illness: fever and stumbling, which can progress to being down and struggling to stand.

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▪ Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside.

▪ Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused children's pools, old tires, or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.

▪ Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.

Overall, mosquito-borne illnesses, like EEE, will continue to pose a risk to both animals and humans until late fall when nighttime temperatures consistently fall below freezing.