

‘This Truly Affects Our Trust’



Posted on Wednesday, September 16th, 2020 and is filed under [FEATURE](#), [News..](#)



EGLE Water Resources Director Cheri Meyer (left) and Riverdale Citizen’s Committee Chairman Bob Lombard (center) look on as EGLE Aquatic Biology Specialist Molly Rippke (right) takes a surface water sample at Lumberjack Road just outside Seville Township on Monday. (Herald photo – Selmon)

Riverdale Citizens Upset By Unannounced Water Testing

By Emma Selmon
Herald News Editor

Riverdale residents were surprised to find state officials taking water samples in their community on Monday morning — less than a week after they were last assured that they would be notified when the agency would do any testing in the township.

Three members of the Water Resources Division, a subset of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), arrived in Riverdale early Monday morning to sample waters for E. coli.

The testing had been requested by the Riverdale Citizen’s Committee at a virtual meeting with EGLE and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) last Wednesday evening. The meeting resumed discussions for a long-term solution to septic issues in Riverdale, which were identified two years ago when systems at 12 properties were discovered to be directly connected to a county drain.

Bob Lombard, Chairman of the Riverdale Citizen's Committee, said that it was an "accident" that the townspeople even found out that EGLE was there on Monday. The grandson of a fellow committee member was working on a property in the area when he happened to notice the agency arrive around 8:30 a.m., and promptly notified the committee.

Lombard said the committee members are "very upset" that EGLE did not tell them exactly when they would perform the sampling, especially since they had been promised last year by the director of EGLE that the committee would be notified of — and allowed to observe — any and all testing.

That assurance was reiterated in last Wednesday's meeting, when Lombard "repeatedly" reminded EGLE of this agreement. Lombard told The Herald that there was "no reason" for EGLE not to make the township aware of their plans on Monday.

"This truly affects our trust," Lombard said.

Cheri Meyer, the Lansing district supervisor of the Water Resources Department, was among the EGLE representatives on the call on Wednesday and onsite Monday morning. She said that she had sent out an email on Friday to everyone who was a part of last week's meeting to confirm that the water testing would take place in the coming week, weather permitting.

She said that the decision to test on Monday morning specifically was "really last-minute" because the agency wanted to take advantage of the favorable weather conditions. She apologized to the townspeople, saying that she "didn't realize" that the Friday email was not a sufficient notification.

Tish Mallory, Seville Township supervisor, confirmed that she had received this email from Meyer, but said that she and the committee were expecting a follow-up message with a specific date and time so that they could observe the sampling. She said that they have made it "crystal clear" that they wanted to know exactly when any testing would occur.

Mallory said she was "concerned" that they did not receive such communication from EGLE.

"It's unfortunate that [they're] not being transparent, and that's all we're asking for," she said.

"We don't have anything to hide...we just want to be aware of what's going on."

Another concern the committee had with the testing on Monday was the fact that EGLE intends to sample only one day — and that they had no intention to do any water quality testing in the area before the committee asked for it on Wednesday.

Lombard pointed out that it was water quality testing that led to the discovery of the 12 directly-connected properties two years ago, which Riverdale citizens promptly worked to disconnect. He is confident that testing will reveal that the community is no longer contributing to the high E. coli counts in the Pine River, noting that their own water quality tests have repeatedly shown that the river is cleaner immediately downstream of Riverdale than it is upstream.

Lombard said that to get a full assessment of the water quality, multiple sampling events should occur over a number of days. The fact that EGLE will only sample one day — and that they did not plan to sample before it was brought up at the Wednesday meeting — suggests to Lombard that the department is more focused on getting a community sewer system installed than fixing pollution in the Pine River.

"We believe that if they were really concerned about the pollution at this point in time, given what we already know by our own testing last year, they should be upstream looking, because what's coming downstream is much worse than what's coming out of Riverdale," he said.

Molly Rippke, aquatic biology specialist with EGLE's Water Resources Division, collected samples from at least nine locations on Monday. Rippke confirmed that they "ideally" would collect samples over multiple days as Lombard said, but it is "a little too late in the year to be beginning such a long-term study."

When asked if EGLE would have done more water quality testing if the meeting request had happened a few months ago, Rippke told the Herald that “this situation was not typical” in that it did not come through the department’s formal request process, which is in place in part to make best use of the department’s budget.

“We don’t have the resources to monitor every water body in Michigan all the time,” she said. In the meeting on Wednesday, Meyer defended her department’s decision not to focus their efforts on water quality testing. She explained that surface water testing would not catch all failing septic systems in the community. Instead, the most “defensible” process to determine whether septic failure is widespread in Riverdale would be to evaluate the systems that lack documentation.

The MMDHD and the Citizen’s Committee disagreed at the start of the meeting on how many properties actually lack documentation. Liz Braddock, the MMDHD’s environmental health division director, said that 68 properties lack records with the health department. Lombard, however, said that upon reviewing records from the company who installed the systems, Security Septic, only 18 properties lack documentation, and seven of those are vacant.

EGLE and the MMDHD would like to see evaluations completed on some of these properties to determine if the systems are functioning correctly, so it was determined at the meeting that the Citizen’s Committee and the MMDHD would get together in the coming days to review the documents and determine which properties should be prioritized for evaluation.

They also agreed that EGLE, in addition to testing water samples in the community, would also look into financial assistance for the cost of the evaluations. The MMDHD offers septic system evaluations for \$196 per property, which could be subsidized by a 50 percent matching grant from EGLE.

EGLE’s Meyer said that she is “looking forward” to working with the township and MMDHD to “determine the status” of these properties.

“We were happy to start working on a plan moving forward so that we can evaluate these properties to protect public health and the environment,” she said.

Much of the hour-and-a-half-long meeting was devoted to discussing these undocumented properties, and less time was spent focusing on the original properties that prompted these discussions two years ago. Lombard shared that of the original 12 properties that were directly connected to the county drain, four have their septic systems up and running. Of the remaining eight, four have permits issued and are awaiting construction, two are pending approval, one has a tank-only system due to a local contaminant from a former gas station, and one is vacant.

The meeting was primarily comprised of individuals from the Seville Township Board, Riverdale Citizens Committee, EGLE and MMDHD, but they were joined by Gratiot County Drain Commissioner Bernie Barnes, Gratiot Conservation District Administrator Julie Spencer, and State Senator Rick Outman.

The group will reconvene for a follow-up meeting in the coming weeks.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, September 17, 2020

ALMA ELEMENTARY, COLLEGE GRAPPLE WITH OUTBREAKS

By Emma Selmon
Herald News Editor

Schools in Gratiot County and beyond are facing COVID-19 outbreaks just a few weeks after classes resumed for the fall.

Two schools in Gratiot have reported positive COVID-19 cases, both in Alma: Luce Road Elementary School and Alma College.

At Luce Road Elementary School, the first positive case in a staff member was identified on Sept. 2. Three days later, a second case was identified and the decision was made to transition to all-remote instruction for two weeks.

Alma Superintendent Donalynn Ingersoll said that the decision to close the school to in-person instruction was made following advice from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), noting that the definition of an “outbreak” is two or more positive cases that are linked to the same exposure.

The school has been working with the MMDHD to complete contact tracing. Anyone who was within six feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes, with or without a facial covering, was considered a close contact.

As of press time, six positive COVID-19 cases are associated with Luce Road Elementary School, according to data from the State of Michigan. Both staff and students have been infected.

Though the “quick move” to remote learning was “difficult for most families,” Ingersoll said that parents have been “very understanding” of the need to follow MMDHD guidance and keep the community safe.

“Families have been very gracious in rearranging their schedules to accommodate the move to Panthers On-Line,” she said.

Wendy Guyette, administrative assistant to the superintendent, confirmed that as of press time, Luce Road is planning to resume classes on Friday, as was indicated in the Sept. 5 letter to parents.

At Alma College, a second round of COVID-19 testing took place early this week. All students, staff, faculty and contractors were tested for the virus, three weeks after the first round of testing took place at the beginning of the semester.

See **OUTBREAKS** on page 5

OUTBREAKS *continued from page 1*

Though results of the most recent testing were not available by press time, Alma College is reporting a total of 10 COVID-19 cases, four of which have recovered.

Tim Rath, spokesperson for Alma College, said that of the 10 positive cases, one has been a staff member and the rest have been students.

Rath said that the first round of COVID-19 viral testing “helped identify a small number of positive cases” in the campus community, which allowed the college to “move quickly to limit the spread.”

Alma College does not consider COVID-19 testing to be “a means of virus prevention on campus.”

“These test results provide a data point — a point in time — which we use to guide our decision-making moving forward,” Rath said.

The college has expanded the number of COVID-19 isolation dorms available for positive students. Rath said this decision was made “out of an abundance of caution” when for one day last week, the college reached half-capacity of their quarantine occupancy.

Alma College so far has fared better than its neighbor to the north. Central Michigan University is reporting 271 total positive cases, all of which have been student cases.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, September 17, 2020

Virtual PBB Community Meetings Set for Next Week

Emory University and multiple Michigan community partners are hosting two virtual community meetings to discuss the health findings of the Michigan PBB Registry and give updates on ongoing PBB research. The first meeting will be on Tuesday, September 22nd from 6:30-8:30 PM EST and the second meeting will be on Saturday, September 26th from 9:30-11:30 AM EST.

In addition to learning the most recent PBB-related health findings, meeting attendees will hear stories from the PBB Oral History Project, and be able to ask questions of the researchers and PBB partners, including representatives from the PBB Citizens Advisory Board, the Pine River Superfund Citizens Task Force, and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

There are multiple methods to access the event.

Watch, Listen, and Chat: Login to your Facebook account and watch us on Facebook Live at www.facebook.com/PBBRegistry/live/

Watch and Listen: Watch us on Facebook Live even if you do not have a Facebook account. www.facebook.com/PBBRegistry/live

Listen: Call in at (312) 626-6799 and use the Meeting ID: 937 5367 1424. All callers will be muted.

Another way to Watch, Listen, and Chat: Join via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/93753671424>

If this is your first time participating in a Zoom meeting, you will be prompted to download and install Zoom when you use the Zoom meeting link.

If you join and are unable to chat you can send any of your questions to pbbregistry@emory.edu

Daily News

Monday, September 21, 2020



Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) Superintendent Kyle Hamlin provides an update at Thursday's meeting of the MAISD Board of Education. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

MAISD focusing on enrollment, making strides in special ed

CORY SMITH
csmith@thedailynews.cc

STANTON — One month into the school year, schools districts across the state continue to work through the challenges of offering in-person learning amid the coronavirus pandemic.

One of the first of such districts to return to in-person learning was the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD), having begun the school year Aug. 17, coordinating with the other school districts throughout Montcalm County as they all started their school year throughout that third week of August.

Meeting for the first time Thursday since the new school year began, members of the MAISD Board of Education received an update from district officials as to how things have gone since students and teachers returned to the classroom.

"We have all of our protocols in place," MAISD Superintendent Kyle Hamlin said. "The (Mid-Michigan District) Health Department has been great to work with and the local schools have been great to work with, with no exact situation having been alike."

A number of districts throughout the county have reported students or staff with positive coronavirus cases; however, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, no schools have reported an outbreak, which that department defines as two or more COVID-19 cases where the individuals may have shared exposure at the school grounds and are not from the same household.

Hamlin stressed the importance of working in effort to prevent any such outbreak from occurring.

"If by chance somebody does have it, or has symptoms, you have to stop the flow from taking place," he said. "That's been a huge part of what we are focusing on — limiting the exposure of someone who may be positive. We're just not taking a lot of chances."

One such example of that diligence came from Superintendent of Career Technical Education Shannon Tripp, who gave a report for the Montcalm Area Career Center.

"We did have our first positive COVID student here at the Career Center a few weeks ago," she said. "The good news is none of the students who were considered close contacts ever ended up coming down with COVID, it was just that one original student and that student was able to eventually come back to school."

Tripp said upon being informed that a student had tested positive, she reached out to the MMDHD and Administrative Services Coordinator Penny Dora so the information could be relayed effectively.

"For the first time going through that

Continues on Page 3



The Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) Board of Education met virtually via Zoom on Thursday for its monthly board meeting. Pictured top row from left, Administrative Services Coordinator Penny Dora, Board Vice President Mark Christensen and Trustee Susan Sunden; second row from left, MAISD Superintendent Kyle Hamlin, Superintendent of Career Technical Education Shannon Tripp and Trustee Kurt Peasley; third row from left, Lakeview Community Schools Business Manager Tricia Root, MAISD Associate Superintendent for Instruction Stephanie O'Dea and Associate Superintendent for Special Education Daniel Brant; at bottom, Trustee Andrea Tabor. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

MAISD focusing on enrollment, special ed

Continued from Page 1

experience, it wasn't too bad," she said.

Tripp added that despite the coronavirus leading to many students in the county choosing to attend school through virtual means, enrollment at the MACC is on par with the 2019-2020 school year.

"We're at 232 students, and looking at last year with 237, we're at about the same point," she said.

Tripp said while it's encouraging the coronavirus hasn't necessarily impacted enrollment with a significant decrease, the numbers are not where she desires.

"When I was a teacher here with 15 programs we had around 500 students attending," she said. "We now have 10 programs that we offer and I figured what full capacity would be — about 350 students — so we definitely have space for more students. COVID is not the issue. What I want to work toward is building some excitement for career technical education in our local districts."

With the coronavirus preventing in-person recruiting and trips to local manufacturers for students, Tripp said she is placing an additional focus on social media outreach to attract students to the MACC.

"We'll be working on that all year," she said.

Tripp said one encouraging number pertains to the Early College Enrollment with Montcalm Community College (MCC), where students enroll at the college during their ju-

nior year of college, and graduate from high school and MCC after five total years with both their high school diploma and an associate's degree.

Despite losing Ionia High School from that program, Tripp said 98 students are currently enrolled.

"That's up from last year, so that's very nice to see," she said.

In regards to special education, Associate Superintendent for Special Education Daniel Brant said only two students are attending school virtually, with all others attending in-person.

"We've been working really closely with our families, our staff and supervisors have been working very strongly with the health department, really ensuring that we have all the safety protocols in place," he said. "We've only had a few incidents where we've had to pull a student out of class, but all of those students have come back after testing negative."

Brant said while some quarantines have been issued, they have been "very limited" in scope.

"We follow and work very closely with the health department. If there's a possibility of exposure, they take over and give us guidance. Every point so far where that's happened — knock on wood — they've tested negative," he said. "We're pretty hyper-vigilant with that because many of the students that we have are health-fragile, some severe with tracheotomies, and they are very high risk. The parents of those students are trusting us

with their child in school.

With the families that have chosen not to have their child attend school in-person, Brant said the MAISD has been working on a daily basis to accommodate them.

"We had one student particularly who already has lung issues and that parent did not feel comfortable. We absolutely understood," he said. "That student is now participating four hours a day via camera and two-way participation and we have another student who is on a homebound program."

In some good news, Brant said he was nearly brought to tears after receiving the district's compliance workbook for Secondary Transition (B-13) that was released recently by the Michigan Department of Education.

"We have zero issues that we have to right-correct for," he said.

According to Brant, that marks the first time since compliance data has been collected that the MAISD special education program did not have to right-correct at least one issue. "That was hard work between our local districts and us, it has paid off," he said. "We worked very closely when doing the audits and the fruits of our labor have been seen."

As a result of that data, Brant said he firmly believes after showing significant growth in various areas, the MAISD will be removed from the state's needs-intervention list.

"That's really great news for special education and it's due to hard work and a team effort across the county," he said.

MID-MICHIGAN

COVID-19 outbreak associated with Alma elementary grows by 283%

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

The COVID-19 outbreak at Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center increased by 283% in one week, going from six to 23. Outside of colleges and universities, it is currently the biggest school-related outbreak in Michigan.

Both students and staff have reported cases of the disease, according to the MDHHS website, which is updated every week at 3 p.m. Monday. Luce's student body includes children in pre-school to first grade.

The school is also less than a mile from Alma College, which the state says has 12 cases. The Alma College dashboard says that actually there are 17 COVID-19 cases in its community. That is an increase of seven since last Tuesday, when the college reported 10.

Gratiot County's cases increased by 10 from Thursday to Monday afternoon, going from 208 to 218. They have increased by 20 since last Monday, when the state announced six cases at the school.

In-school education was halted at Luce after a second case was identified earlier this month. Alma School District officials announced a two-week hiatus in in-person classes starting Sept. 8.

Classes resumed Friday based on guidance from Mid Michigan District Health Department, the district's superintendent's office said.

Fifteen people in Gratiot County have died from CO-

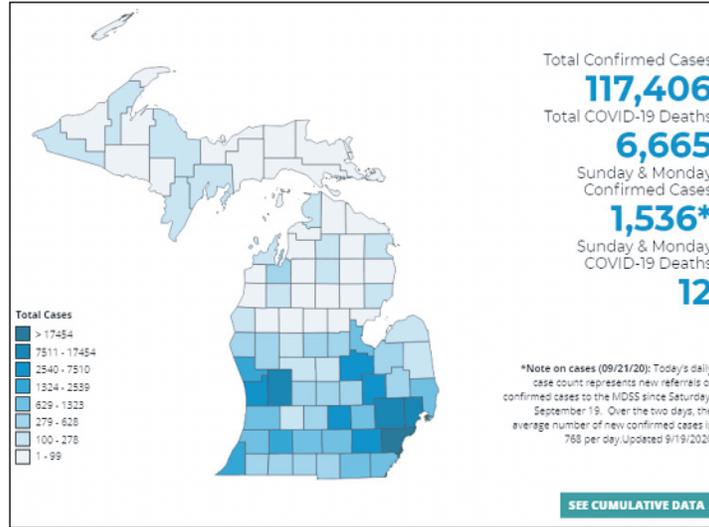


IMAGE COURTESY OF MICHIGAN.GOV

Around the state, another 1,536 cases were announced for a cumulative total of 117,406.

VID-19.

The area's biggest school-related outbreak is at Central Michigan University, which as of the last update by the Central Michigan District Health Department on Friday had grown by 22 confirmed cases over the previous week.

CMDHD's weekly CMU-related update had the number of cases at 304, 288 of which were confirmed and 16 probable. That is 48% of the county's overall number of confirmed cases, which on Monday increased to 598. The 16 probable cases associated with CMU's return to school is, by contrast, just 21.6% of the county's 74 probable cases.

Over the same time, CMU reported nine cases. The difference between the health department's reporting and the

university's is that the university uses a much narrower definition of associated cases.

CMDHD reporting includes secondary cases caused by former students and members of the broader community who have had contact with COVID-positive people associated with CMU. It is a number more reflective of the disease's actual spread related to an outbreak.

Twelve people in Isabella County have died from COVID-19, including three in September. The third September death, the second in less than a week, occurred Thursday and involved an elderly man who was hospitalized.

That death was not associated with the CMU return-to-school outbreak.

Two other mid-Michigan

counties have seen a significant boost in confirmed cases from post-secondary school outbreaks.

In Mecosta County, the number of cases increased by 18, from 164 Thursday to Monday's 182, buoyed by an outbreak at Ferris State University that includes 57 students. Two people have died there from the disease.

Since Thursday, cases in Midland County have increased by 32, from 442 on Thursday to 474 on Monday, with 11 deaths. Some of those cases include an outbreak at Northwood University that includes 55 students.

Elsewhere in mid-Michigan, the number of confirmed cases in Clare County pushed past the 100 mark, increasing from 98 last Thursday to 102 on Monday. Four people have died there.

Two more cases were announced in Gladwin County since Thursday, bringing the number from 80 to 82. Two people have died. In Montcalm County, another 15 cases were confirmed between Thursday and Monday, bringing their total confirmed cases from 252 to 267, with five deaths.

Around the state, another 1,536 cases were announced for a cumulative total of 117,406. Those numbers reflect confirmed cases from both Saturday and Sunday, with a two-day average of 768. Twelve more deaths were announced for a total of 6,665.

The death rate, more technically known as the case fatality rate, fell from 5.8% to 5.7%.

Daily News

Tuesday, September 22, 2020

Take precautions to avoid mosquito bites and the diseases they carry

Submitted by Mid-Michigan District
Health Department

That annoying buzzing sound you hear when you are trying to enjoy the great outdoors is a dead give-away that a pesky mosquito is near. Yes, mosquitoes are incredibly annoying and relentless, but did you know they can also be dangerous?

Mosquitoes are known carriers of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV), diseases they contract when feeding on infected birds and then pass on to humans, horses, and other mammals. These diseases cannot be passed between mammals, but the discovery of multiple cases of EEE in horses in Montcalm County and one case of WNV in a human in Clinton County indicate that these diseases are in the area.

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

Symptoms of EEE in horses can include fever, head pressing, wandering, and stumbling, and can progress to an inability to stand.

Most people who contract WNV have no symptoms, but those who do become ill three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms of West Nile virus can include high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, stiff neck, and a severe headache. More serious complications include meningitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain linings) and encephalitis (inflammation of the

brain). These diseases usually require hospitalization, can be life threatening, and even fatal.

Here are several ways you can protect yourself and your family from mosquitoes and the diseases they can carry:

- Avoid outdoor activities between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.

- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET or Picaridin, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved product to exposed skin (following the manufacturer's directions for use), to everyone over six months of age.

- Treat clothing with repellent.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.

- Maintain window and door screens to help keep mosquitoes outside.

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

- Cover cribs, strollers, and baby carriages with mosquito netting.

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

Ways you can protect your horses and other domestic animals from include:

- Vaccinate horses against EEE

- Place horses and livestock in a barn under fans from dusk to dawn

- Use an insect repellent on animals that is approved for the species

- Eliminate standing water on your property and changing water in buckets and bowls at least once a day.

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

Local Health Officials Encourage Flu Shot in Wake of COVID Pandemic

 Posted on Wednesday, September 23rd, 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.



The Rite Aid on Wright Avenue in Alma encourages passersby to stop in and get their flu vaccine. This year in particular, it'd be best to heed that advice, as it's possible to contract both COVID-19 and the flu at the same time, and patients who do are at a much higher risk of suffering serious complications. (Herald photo – Selmon)

By Emma Selmon
Herald [News](#) Editor

It may be as early as November, or it might come around the new year. It may arrive even later than that. No one is quite sure of the timeline, but a COVID-19 vaccine is on its way, and local [health](#) organizations are hard at work to prepare for it.

But for both the Mid-Michigan Health Department (MMDHD) and the local MidMichigan Health hospital system, these preparations involve an emphasis on different vaccines — ones that are already available. Thanks to training grant dollars from the state, the MMDHD has been collaborating with other local health departments on their approach to COVID-19 vaccine preparations, said Marcus Cheatham, health officer. A three part plan is in the works, the final part of which will be to administer the COVID-19 vaccine when it arrives.

But for now, the focus is on ensuring that children are up-to-date on their routine inoculations — and that everyone who is able to is getting their flu shot.

These efforts may seem unrelated to the pandemic, but they serve two important purposes. They will lay the groundwork for the rapid immunization of a large number of people, which is helpful for when a COVID-19 vaccine is eventually available. And, by preventing concurrent outbreaks of other diseases, they will ensure that a public health crisis doesn't get worse.

“We've got to try to make sure we don't have these other outbreaks, whether it's measles or flu, in the middle of COVID,” Cheatham said. “So it's like a triple threat that we're getting here.”

Since the summer, the MMDHD has been working to get back on track with the routine childhood vaccinations that were put on hold due to COVID-19. When health departments were closed to in-person work for a few months near the beginning of the pandemic, many children fell behind in these inoculations.

Cheatham said that it's going to be “very, very challenging” for health departments to “get caught up on childhood immunizations,” but it's important to do so. It protects the population from outbreaks of preventable

illnesses — something that's especially vital during COVID-19.

And now that fall is here, the MMDHD is also working on the second part of their plan — trying to weaken an epidemic that hits every year.

The Flu Vaccine: “More Important Than Ever Before”

The onset of this year's flu season marks a particular challenge, as the country had already been hit hard by another potentially deadly respiratory virus.

The good news is that flu, unlike COVID, is a vaccine-preventable disease. The bad news is that there just aren't enough people taking advantage of that vaccine.

Even in a non-pandemic year, it's a struggle to get enough Michiganders to get their flu shot.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), just 46 percent of Michigan residents over 6 months old received a flu vaccine for the 2018–19 flu season. That's below the national average of just over 49 percent — and not enough to “really blunt the flu epidemic that we have every winter,” Cheatham said.

Because the flu is a potentially deadly virus on its own, the flu shot is something health agencies encourage every year. But this year, with the COVID-19 pandemic still in full force, it's “more important than ever before to get the flu vaccine,” according to Lydia Watson, senior vice president and chief medical officer of MidMichigan Health.

The flu season in the United States begins in late fall and ends in early spring, so the upcoming season actually won't be the first time Michigan has seen COVID-19 and the flu at the same time. The 2019–20 flu season was just winding down when the novel coronavirus first hit in early March.

What's different about the coming months is that both the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020–21 flu season will overlap in full force — and if the flu epidemic isn't mitigated by widespread immunization, this overlap will be dangerous.

Two Deadly Viruses

Early in the pandemic, Watson said that MidMichigan Health would routinely co-test suspected COVID patients for both the novel coronavirus and other common respiratory illnesses, like flu or strep. Several of the patients that did test positive for COVID-19 also tested positive for another respiratory illness as well.

“It was not unusual to see patients test positive for either both COVID and flu or COVID and strep,” Watson said.

For patients with both COVID and the flu, it's tough to tell which virus is causing which symptoms, Watson said. Fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, and fatigue are just a few of the symptoms that are indicative of either virus. One symptom that is particular to COVID-19, however, is a change or loss of taste or smell.

Regardless of what virus is responsible for the symptoms, there is a very real possibility individuals who simultaneously contract COVID-19 and the flu will be “more significantly ill” than if they had contracted only one or the other.

“If you end up with both, there's more of a chance of ending up needing to be hospitalized in the intensive care unit, and potentially even dying,” Watson said.

For Watson, she thinks it's “important to remember” that flu alone is a potentially lethal virus. Young children, pregnant women, and adults over the age of 65 are most at risk for flu complications, along with adults with chronic illnesses, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes.

Watson said that each year, 23,000 to 61,000 people in the United States die from the flu. Last year, six children in Michigan died from that virus.

COVID-19 has an even higher fatality rate: that virus has killed 200,000 people in the United States in just six months.

The combination of COVID-19 and flu brings back into the equation one of the early pandemic fears — overwhelming hospitals. Watson said that if Michigan enters this flu season with the same level of vaccination they've seen over recent years, there is “absolutely” a possibility that hospitals will be overrun with critically ill patients.

Deathly ill flu patients — whether they also have COVID or not — also require hospital beds, intensive care unit space and ventilators.

For Watson, the “biggest reason” to get a flu shot this year is to prevent hospitals from being overrun.

“If less people get flu that requires hospitalization, then we won't overwhelm our hospitals with seriously ill flu patients on top of our seriously ill COVID patients, especially those that may need to go into the intensive care units or use ventilation,” she said.

Getting Your Shot

Each flu season features a different strain of the virus, so it's important to get a flu shot every year, Watson said. But because the vaccine is not 100 percent effective, it's important that as many people as possible get the flu shot to establish herd immunity, the MMDHD's Cheatham said.

"[It's] really one of those shots where my shot protects you, your shot protects me," he said. "Unless we both get it, we're not protected, and almost every year, we fail to get there."

Cheatham said that the flu vaccine is only 60 to 70 percent protective of the individual. This is because there is a degree of guesswork involved in developing the yearly flu vaccine: developers track the virus as it spreads across the globe and try to determine which strain will be the most common in the United States, Watson said. If the vaccine isn't the best match, it is possible for someone who got their flu shot to contract the virus later on. But even so, the vaccine helps: Watson said that those who get their flu shot reduce their risk of being admitted to the hospital by 40 to 60 percent. They reduce their risk of ending up in the intensive care unit by 60 to 80 percent, and they "significantly" reduce their risk of death.

Watson said that a common misconception that deters "many people" from getting their flu shot is the fear that the shot itself will make them sick, even though health providers know that "the flu vaccine does not and cannot cause flu."

The flu vaccine contains the inactivated flu virus, or it is made with proteins from that flu virus, Watson said. When it is injected into a patient's system, it causes their body to produce antibodies that can fight off the virus if they do encounter it.

It is possible to experience some mild side effects as these antibodies are being produced — "some degree of muscle ache, fatigue, sometimes nausea, sometimes headache, sometimes a low-grade fever," Watson said. But the majority of people do not experience any side effects, which are "mild and short-lived" anyway.

"When people get those symptoms, they think they got the flu from the vaccine. But that's actually meaning your antibodies are developing, and your response is actually good," Watson said. "That's a healthy set of symptoms to be having."

Getting a COVID vaccine is important for the health of the community, especially to protect those who can't get a vaccine due to allergies or medical issues, Watson said. And Cheatham pointed out that it's also important to stay healthy while schools and workplaces are using symptom-based screenings to keep potential COVID carriers out.

If 10 or 15 percent of the population winds up with flu, this symptom-based screening is "going to be just a mess."

"Maybe they should be screened out — maybe they shouldn't be in school if they have flu — but they'll be put into the 14-day quarantine for COVID if they have these symptoms, which is not what we want to do," Cheatham said. "We want them back in school as soon as possible."

The measures that are encouraged to slow the spread of COVID-19, like hand hygiene, masking and social distancing, do help to slow the spread of flu as well, but are not protective enough to skip out on your yearly flu shot. Watson pointed out that just as COVID cases continue to rise, the flu will spread as well if people do not get vaccinated.

Watson said that flu shots are available through local health departments, primary care providers, or retailers such as Walgreens or Walmart. As with all health care in the era of COVID-19, she emphasized that it is safe to go out and get your flu shot, but recommends calling ahead.

Three children infected in Luce Road elementary COVID outbreak

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com

Multimedia journalist

Three students at Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center were infected by COVID-19 as part of that school's outbreak. The outbreak also involved six staff members and 13 people who were secondary cases.

First reported as 23 cases on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services web-

CHILDREN » PAGE 2

Children

FROM PAGE 1

site, the number was revised down to 22 by Mid Michigan District Health Department, which covers Gratiot County. The MDHHS website does not break down cases as either primary or secondary.

A primary case is one that involves an infection directly during an outbreak event. A secondary case is someone who is infected by someone who was infected directly during an outbreak event.

The school was closed for in-person learning from Sept. 8 until Friday due to the outbreak. It reopened based on MMDHD guidance, school officials said Monday.

Gratiot County has seen an additional 49 cases during the month of September, bringing the number from 176 to 225 as of Tuesday's update, seven of them since Monday and 17 since Friday. No one has died in Gratiot County since July 20, when the county recorded its 15th death.

Some of those cases come from Alma College, which has seen a cumulative total 18 cases, nine of which have been recorded in the last 10 days.

Five more cases were reported Tuesday in Isabella County for a cumulative total of 603, as was the county's 13th death. An elderly

woman with underlying health conditions died Tuesday, said Steve Hall, health officer for Central Michigan District Health Department. She is the second Isabella County resident to have died from the disease in less than a week and the fourth in September.

Isabella County's COVID cases have increased by 297 since Aug. 10, the approximate date that students began returning to CMU's campus. CMDHD reported Friday that 288 confirmed cases are related to the university's return. Nearly 1 percent of the county's residents have had confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Elsewhere, six more cases were reported in Midland County, for a total of 480. Midland County's COVID numbers have been boosted by an outbreak at Northwood University that has involved 55 students. Six more cases were also reported in Montcalm County, increasing its total from 267 to 273.

Clare County, with 102 cases; Gladwin County, with 2 cases; and Mecosta County, with 182 cases, all remained unchanged from Monday. Mecosta County's outbreak includes 57 students at Ferris State University.

Statewide, 504 cases were announced for a cumulative total of 117,910.

Eric Baerren is a multimedia journalist for The Morning Sun.

Daily News

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

UPDATE: CC-C schools shut down due to coronavirus outbreak

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on September 23, 2020

CARSON CITY — Carson City-Crystal Area Schools was one of the few Montcalm County school districts enjoying a smooth back-to-school experience with no coronavirus cases — until this week.



Superintendent John Sattler

A school staff member who was out sick contacted the district Tuesday morning to report she had tested positive for COVID-19, according to CC-C Superintendent John Sattler. A total of 13 more staff members were asked to quarantine due to having had direct contact with the female staff member. By Wednesday, three more staff members had tested positive — plus a student who had no contact with any of those staff members.

The news means CC-C is the first school district in Montcalm County to have what is considered a coronavirus outbreak — defined by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services as two or more cases that are unrelated.

Separately, The Laurels of Carson City also has a coronavirus outbreak, according to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which said the nursing home outbreak and the CC-C school outbreak are not related. Health department officials were not available to provide any additional details Wednesday.

“It’s kind of heartbreaking because we were doing so well. We were doing great with face-to-face instruction. We had sports going on. Things were looking good, and then things changed,” Sattler summarized.

Because the situation was changing so quickly and so many staff members had to be quarantined, Sattler decided to cancel school Wednesday and to switch over to virtual or distance learning starting Thursday until at least Oct. 4.

“I canceled school for today because of staffing issues,” Sattler said. “Everything is shut down all the way through Oct. 4. I’m having the teachers working from home. I’m shutting the buildings down and everything.”

The shutdown includes sports, such as the CC-C football team which just started its season with an overtime win against Tawas last Friday and were scheduled to play Coleman on the road this Friday.

“All sports have been canceled up through Oct. 4, practices and everything,” Sattler said. “We’re going to really shut things down.”

Sattler said 28% of CC-C students were participating in the school’s virtual learning option before the outbreak. He said now that the entire district is switching over to virtual learning, staff will work to drop off learning packets to any families who don’t have reliable internet access. School meals will also be distributed this Friday and next Wednesday, similar to how the district provided meals to students this past summer.

Sattler said none of the staff members or student who tested positive have displayed symptoms or felt sick so far. Sattler said he has been working with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in this situation.

“They were great, they’ve been wonderful to work with,” he said. “They talked to us about protocol and symptoms and tracing symptoms. I have a really great staff that’s been working hard and finding out where everyone has been and tracing their last contact.

“There’s a lot of stuff going on and at the same time we’re trying to make sure that our staff and students and parents feel comfortable,” he added. “Hopefully we can go back to face to face instruction on Oct. 5.”

School Board President Gregg McAlvey and Board Vice President Ben Adkins both declined to comment for this story, referring the Daily News to Sattler.

“This situation is ever-changing and he (Sattler) is the best single source for information,” Adkins said.

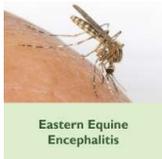
Daily News

Thursday, September 24, 2020

JUST IN: Sheridan resident suspected to have contracted EEE

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on September 24, 2020

SHERIDAN — A Sheridan resident has a suspected case of Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) which, if confirmed, would be the second human case in the state of Michigan this year.



EEE is a virus that can be spread by infected mosquitos to humans and other mammals. Mosquitos become infected with the virus by feeding on infected birds, which are the host animal for the infection. — Submitted photo

Mid-Michigan District Health Department Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse reported the news during Wednesday's Board of Health meeting. She said the individual's lab test was done by Mayo Clinic and was then sent to a Michigan lab for a second test. Preliminary test results showed the individual has EEE.

Morse said a confirmatory test is now being run, which will take several more days.

“Unfortunately this individual had other illnesses and I found out that they are home on hospice,” Morse shared.

EEE is a virus that can be spread by infected mosquitos to humans and other mammals. Mosquitos become infected with the virus by feeding on infected birds, which are the host animal for the infection, according to the health department.

Last year, Michigan had 10 human cases of EEE, six of which were fatal. This year, Michigan has one confirmed human case in Barry County, meaning the new Montcalm County case would be the second human case if confirmed. Michigan has also had 32 animal cases this summer — 30 horses (including horses in Montcalm and Ionia counties) and two deer.

Morse said there are two vaccines available for horses to prevent against EEE, but there is no vaccine or treatment for humans, meaning preventing mosquito bites is the most important safeguard against EEE (such as avoiding going outside between dusk and dawn, wearing clothes that covers all your skin and using mosquito repellent. Morse said two “really hard freezes” are needed this autumn to kill the infected mosquitos.

“Many people who get infected with EEE never have symptoms,” Morse noted. “Only about 4 to 5 percent of people do have symptoms, they're basically like flu-like symptoms — you get chills, fever, weakness, some people are achy and tired for weeks and months but they recover.

“Less than 1 percent of people get the severe illness, which is encephalitis or meningitis, and of that less than 1 percent who get that severe illness, at least 30 percent of them will die,” she said. “Of the ones who don’t die, they are typically left with serious, chronic, longterm dysfunction — they have brain damage, they have seizures and paralysis — and many of them go on to die within a few years.

“It’s really rare ... but for those who do get it, it’s really, really bad,” she summarized.

The Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) on Sept. 11 announced a recommendation that all outdoor activities be canceled due to EEE, especially activities involving youths. On Sept. 14, the MDHHS announced aerial spraying would take place to kill infected adult mosquitoes. That spraying process began Sept. 16 and included multiple locations in Montcalm and Ionia counties.

The product used in the aerial spraying is Merus, the same chemical used in last year’s spraying. Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham noted that while the state says Merus does not harm pollinators, such as bees, two Michigan State University professors disagree.

“Everyone agrees that the threat to pollinators and agriculture is a really big deal in environmental health,” Cheatham said. “We definitely need public policy solutions.”

Daily News

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Stanton continues Halloween hours debate, reviews CDC guidelines for holiday events

By [Brandon Schreur](#) | on September 24, 2020



The Stanton City Commission continues to discuss how the city can hold Halloween this year in light of the coronavirus pandemic during Tuesday's meeting. Pictured, from top left, are Commissioners Charles Miel, Ray Holloway and Vladimir Edelman, Mayor Lori Williams, Commissioners Mary Thomas and Jane Basom. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

STANTON — As new regulations come out from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office and the CDC, the city of Stanton is still considering how to set Halloween hours.

The topic first came up during the Stanton City Commission's meeting on Sept. 8, at which time City Manager Vester Davis said he'd received a number of calls from residents asking whether the city would be hosting regular trick-or-treating hours.

While Davis and Mayor Lori Williams agreed the city could likely hold some kind of community event, Commissioners Ray Holloway and Jane Basom suggested seeking more information from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

During Tuesday's meeting, Davis reported he had spoken with the health department about the matter over the past two weeks.

"Unfortunately, at the time that I spoke with them, there hadn't been any direction," Davis said. "I talked to the health official there, Marcus Cheatham. He said they were just kind of waiting until something was published by the state governor's office."

While the state's recommendations have not yet been made public, Davis did say the CDC recently put out some guidelines for how to celebrate Halloween safely. Davis said he also consulted other city managers to begin to devise a plan for what Halloween could look like in Stanton and what health and safety practices the city would have to encourage for any kind of event.

"Included in the (agenda) packet is a flyer done-up by a colleague of mine (regarding trick-or-treating)," Davis said. "We wanted to emulate a similar message to our residents. Prior to the CDC's guidelines, we were already encouraging social distancing and for people to travel in small groups. Other than that, ultimately, (trick-or-treating) isn't a city function."

"I know that Trinity Church is planning to have an event coming up on Oct. 31, as well," he noted. "If there are any thoughts on the matter, I'd like to have them now and we can come back to this on the next agenda. You can request the hours be set or some other direction you all feel comfortable with us releasing to the public."

Referencing an article regarding the recent CDC guidelines, Commissioner Ray Holloway pointed out that traditional trick-or-treating is listed as a higher-risk activity that people are being encouraged to avoid.

"I think the post that was presented in the packet from our city manager sends the wrong message," Holloway said. "I would be against publicizing it — especially the part that says we have 'no legal authority (to cancel Halloween).' I think risk management people would be going crazy."

Commissioner Charles Miel disagreed.

"If we don't set anything, people will be running around between noon and midnight," he said. "I think this is better than nothing. We're not condoning anything, but at least we're limiting it to certain hours and not any time they feel like wandering around."

"I don't think this is better than nothing," Holloway countered. "I think it sends the wrong message — we're saying they can do whatever they want. I'd like to send out a message more clearly stating that we want to follow the CDC guidelines that were just released and that it is a risk for people participating and going door-to-door."

Davis pointed out the issue might be one that's more tied-up with public safety.

"There would be a police presence to help people that may need assistance crossing the streets, or just for public safety as a whole," he commented. "Limiting people's movements from one house to the next, though, I think that's kind of a hard thing to enforce."

While Commissioner Jane Basom said she'd also like to see some changes made to the proposed flyer, commissioners agreed to table the matter until their next meeting to give them time to review the CDC's guidelines more carefully.

“At this stage, this is just an announcement of what we’re considering,” Miel noted. “It’s not on the agenda for us to take action on. I think we talked about it, now we can put it on the agenda and look at it next time.”

A full list of the CDC’s guidelines for holiday celebrations can be found at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays) online.

Daily News

Friday, September 25, 2020

Carson City nursing home has COVID outbreak

Staff report

CARSON CITY — A nursing home in Carson City is dealing with its first coronavirus outbreak.

The Laurels of Carson City at 620 N. Second St. has two individuals with COVID-19, according to Sarah Doak, the community

health and education division director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

Doak said the first positive case at The Laurels was reported to the health department on Sept. 11.

The Michigan Department of Health & Human Services defines a COVID outbreak

as two or more cases at one facility that are unrelated.

Carson City-Crystal Area Schools closed all its school buildings on Wednesday due to a separate COVID outbreak at the school, involving at least four staff members and one student, according to Superintendent John Sattler.

ST. LOUIS

CONTAMINATION'S SHADOW

PBB health studies are ongoing but far more are needed

By Linda Gittleman
For The Morning Sun

Research continues on the health impact of the Velsicol Chemical Co. contamination in St. Louis but the COVID-19 virus has slowed things considerably.

At a virtual meeting Tuesday, members of a coalition created to study the health problems of exposure to PBB - the fire retardant polybrominated biphenyl - outlined what they've learned so far and what more they want to learn.

As they have from the beginning, researchers have let the communities in Michigan determine where the research should focus, said Michele Marcus, Emory University Professor of Epidemiology and Environmental Health who has led the studies.

Those studies have shown that PBB is the likely cause of thyroid problems, certain cancers, reproductive issues and digestive problems that could be passed on to subsequent generations.

PBB, not soluble in water, is stored in the body's fat, she said.

When the fire retardant was mixed with the livestock feed in 1973, it entered the food chain and wasn't discovered for a year.

About 60 percent of Michigan residents still have some levels of PBB in their bodies from PBB contaminated food consumed, originating from the incident, Marcus said.

What people in Michigan who have been exposed to PBB want to know now are answers to other problems they or their family members have been experiencing.

Some of those issues concern joint problems, cognitive difficulties such as dementia, and autism, along with auto immune diseases, Marcus said.

"We've recently taken a look at (auto immune disorders) and there is a high rate (in Michiganders) - 25 percent compared to 8 percent (in the U.S population)."

They also want to know if they lose weight will the PBB levels diminish?

Marcus said that there is some indication that weight loss helps but more studies are needed. PBB can travel in and out of the blood stream and bodily fats vary, all making it complicated.

Marcus said that workers in the Velsicol plant have the highest levels of PBB in their bodies, followed by the families of the employees. They in turn are followed by farm families and average Michigan residents.

Another question from people who watched the virtual meeting concerned



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT PRATT

Pine River Superfund Task Force Chair Jane Keon stands next to a tombstone, warning passersby of the contamination at the old Velsicol Chemical plant site in St. Louis.

testing.

Would they have to travel to Michigan to get tested?

The short answer, Marcus said, is yes. These tests are not something their local physician can order up in a lab. However, she asked that those who want to participate to put that on the forms they fill out, "and we'll see if we can work it out."

She cautioned that in or out of Michigan they may not get the test results for about a year, due to COVID-19.

Along with the testing question, physicians' lack of knowledge about PBB was also problematic.

Information for medical professionals is available on the Emory University website

PBB » PAGE 2



MORNING SUN FILE PHOTO

More than 40 years after Velsicol closed its doors, the PBB disaster's impact continues

By Linda Gittleman
For The Morning Sun

Individual stories from the people who lived through the PBB disaster that occurred in the early 1970s in St. Louis - and the rest of the state - will be on file at Central Michigan's Museum of Cultural and Natural History.

Those stories are "incredibly emotional," said Professor Brianny Fremion, who heads the oral history program.

Fremion was one of the speakers at the Tuesday virtual community meeting about PBB.

Fremion and her students have collected the experiences of people who lost their farms due to the PBB mix up with the animal feed, others who lost their jobs, still others who suffered health problems as well as the impact on the city of St. Louis.

"There was a lot of anger in the community," she said.

Contaminated food was sold at the grocery stores and it took far too long for the state to discover the problem.

These "really powerful" stories can inspire future generations, she said.

Thousands of pages, along with videos, have been collected so far and she's looking for more.

Another panelist on the community program was retired Alma College Professor Dr. Ed Lorenz and member of the St. Louis Citizens Superfund Task Force.

Lorenz pointed out that about 8 million people consumed PBB contaminated food in that time period.

The Velsicol Chemical Co. was sued by a host of different parties but the agreement with the state allowed them to demolish the plant and leave the state with no consequences.

IMPACT » PAGE 2

PBB

FROM PAGE 1

site and work continues on a model with more information as it becomes available, she said.

Currently the researchers are looking for some specific volunteers/participants in the studies.

It's known that mothers can transmit PBB to their children, but it's also been indicated that men too can transmit problems to their children as well. That appears to be done via hormone or DNA regulators, Marcus said.

So they are looking for men who are from Michigan but married women from out of state — women who did not live in Michigan in the early 70s.

Those wanting to participate in these studies and others can go to pbbregistry.emory.edu for more information.

At the meeting, it was also asked when families would be compensated for their loss and suffering.



MORNING SUN FILE PHOTO

Dan Wyant, then-director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, representatives from the Michigan House and Senate, and project engineers inspect the chemical collection trenches at the St. Louis Superfund site of the former Velsicol/Michigan Chemical plant in October 2014.

Marcus explained that the state made an agreement with Velsicol. Velsicol would clean up the site and then the company would then have no further responsibility for

anything.

The cleanup failed — clearly it didn't scratch the surface — and Velsicol was utterly off the hook.

"I wish," she said.



The Michigan National Guard's Grand Ledge Aviation Readiness Center pictured Nov. 13, 2019.

MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

PFAS not detected near Grand Ledge Army facility

Christian Martinez

Lansing State Journal

USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Testing of private residential wells near the Grand Ledge Army Support Facility did not detect PFOS or PFOA, among the most common varieties of PFAS chemicals, the Michigan National Guard said Wednesday in a release.

Samples taken last year from the facility grounds were found to have been contaminated with PFAS substances. A retention pond on the site had PFO concentration at 141 parts per trillion, more than twice the limit required for cleanup. One shallow groundwater well had a combined total of 113 parts per trillion of PFAS.

The wells were sampled this summer after a National Guard Board investigation “determined that groundwater flows southeast from the airfield.”

“Out of an abundance of caution, 14 private wells downgradient of the facility were sampled and tested for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS),” the National Guard said in the release.

“The results of this sampling are good news,” said Maj. Gen. Paul Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veteran’s Affairs.

Studies have found potential links between PFAS and increased cholesterol levels, increased risk of thyroid disease, decreased fertility in woman, lower infant birth weights and an increased risk of cancer, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry said.

However, federal health agencies say they cannot directly link PFAS exposure to health conditions and more studies are needed.

“The NGB and the Michigan National Guard will continue to work closely with the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), local county health departments, and the City of Grand Ledge throughout the PFAS investigation process,” the National Guard said.

Contact business reporter Christian Martinez at cmartinez@lsj.com or (517) 267-1342.

Daily News

Saturday, September 26, 2020

‘Beloved Michelle’: CC-C school teacher unexpectedly dies amid COVID outbreak

Michelle McCrackin was a K-6 Title 1 paraprofessional

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on September 26, 2020

CARSON CITY — A Carson City-Crystal educator unexpectedly died Thursday night, just one day after the school district closed down due to a COVID outbreak.

Michelle McCrackin, 53, of Carson City was an employee of CC-C schools for the past 14 years and most recently worked as a Title 1 paraprofessional for kindergarten through sixth grade, according to CC-C Superintendent John Sattler who issued a statement on Friday afternoon about McCrackin’s death.

“Michelle was extremely dedicated to the students and staff at CC-C schools,” Sattler said. “She was also known for her dedicated work as the union president and for her support of staff and her advocacy for doing what is right for the school community.

“As our school community mourns Michelle’s untimely passing together, please keep the McCrackin family in your thoughts and prayers as they navigate through the loss of their beloved Michelle,” Sattler added. “She will be greatly missed.”

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department confirmed that a Montcalm County woman in her 50s died from COVID on Thursday night/Friday morning.

“The health department would like to offer its sincere condolences to the family,” Health Department Public Information Officer Leslie Kinnee said. “Our thoughts and prayers are with them as they mourn this tragic and unexpected loss.

“We would like to reiterate the fact that COVID-19 is actively circulating in our communities and of the importance of wearing a mask and maintaining at least six feet of social distance from others when in public,” Kinnee added.

Montcalm County has now had five COVID-related deaths since March, with a total of 284 positive cases as of Friday (with more than 50 of those cases added since mid-September). The previous four deaths all involved elderly people with “significant” health issues, according to Montcalm County Emergency Services Director Eric Smith.

The CC-C school district shut down Wednesday after it became the first school district in Montcalm County to experience a COVID outbreak — defined by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services as two or more cases that are unrelated.

Sattler previously told the Daily News that a female school staff member who had been out sick contacted the district Tuesday morning to report she had tested positive for COVID-19. A total of 13 more staff members were asked to

quarantine due to having had direct contact with the woman. By Wednesday, three more staff members had tested positive — plus a student who had no contact with any of those staff members.

Because the situation was changing so quickly and so many staff members had to be quarantined, Sattler decided to cancel school Wednesday and to switch over to virtual or distance learning starting Thursday until at least Oct. 4.

Separately, The Laurels of Carson City also has a COVID outbreak, according to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which said the nursing home outbreak and the CC-C school outbreak are not related. The first positive case at The Laurels was reported to the health department on Sept. 11 and has resulted in a total of two positive cases to date.

Daily News

Saturday, September 26, 2020

MCC reports first positive coronavirus case, 5 more students asked to quarantine

With case isolated and no outbreak reported, in-person classes will continue as scheduled

By [Cory Smith](#) | on September 26, 2020

SIDNEY TOWNSHIP — Entering its fifth week of holding in-person classes, Montcalm Community College (MCC) had its first positive coronavirus case this week.



Stacy Young

On Monday, MCC President Stacy Young announced that a student who attends classes on the college's Sidney campus had tested positive after taking a COVID-19 test off-campus.

“We received word late Monday, one of our students had gotten tested for another reason and they let us know that they had tested positive,” Young told the Daily News. “With that information, we immediately went full speed and began working with the health department.”

In a statement released to students and staff, Young said the college worked with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) for guidance and contact tracing.

“Those exposed have been contacted,” Young said in the statement. “The health and wellbeing of our employees and students is our top priority. Out of an abundance of caution, we are deep cleaning and disinfecting the locations impacted tonight.”

Young elaborated to the Daily News that the positive case has resulted in an additional five students being asked to quarantine from home for 14 days.

The MMDHD recommends that anyone who was within six feet of an individual that has tested positive for the coronavirus for 15 minutes or more should quarantine to prevent possible additional exposure to the virus.

While the additional five students didn't fall into that category specifically, Young said they were “close enough” to where she felt instituting a quarantine was necessary.

“The five people were all outside of that six-foot perimeter and they all had masks on, but we felt like this would be, out of an abundance of caution, one extra thing we could do, to make sure we are being as safe as possible. The good news is that all of these students can continue with their classes online.”

Young said in working with the MMDHD, the college had successfully contact-traced all other individuals within an hour and a half.

“It’s so tough because we don’t want to upset people’s lives, but at the same time, this is a few students impacted out of 1,400 enrolled,” she continued. “We will make sure they have all of their school services during this 14-day time period.”

Young said the college personally reached out to all six individuals to ensure they had the necessary materials and technology to continue their classes online at this time.

In reacting to the college’s first reported positive case, Young said current safety protocols in place will not change, except for one additional detail.

“We will ask faculty to make sure they have seating charts ready, so we can quickly perform contact tracing,” she said. “All these changes were new enough this semester, and with masks on, some of the faculty had to really think about who was in their classroom.”

Young said there will be no interruptions or cancellations of classes due to the coronavirus at the college’s Sidney and Greenville cases.

“I had a student who reached out to me, pleading, please don’t close the school down,” Young said. “Were just going to take this case by case. Hopefully, everybody stays safe and healthy, and this student who tested positive stays healthy and recovers quickly.”

With faculty having been on campus since June, Young said the college has several members of its staff who have quarantined over the past several months due to reported possible exposures to others who tested positive outside of the college.

“Nobody hasn’t gotten sick up to this point, they’ve just had to sit 14 days and then come back,” she said. “Nearly every employee can work from home with how things are set up now, so that’s gone very smoothly.”

Young said while it was inevitable to college would likely encounter a positive coronavirus case once school resumed in August, she is proud of the efforts put forth by college staff and students to ensure such positive cases don’t lead to potential outbreaks.

“We’ve had staff and faculty since mid-June without any positive cases, and five weeks in, we have our first student case. I’m really grateful that our team has just stepped up because we could not have what we have today without this great, flexible team, showing grace through all of this as well,” she said. “We have two teams that meet during the week about COVID issues, and we’ll continue working hard to keep everyone safe.”

Young said additional focus at the college is already being placed on spring enrollment, as well as enrollment for the fall of 2021.

With Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announcing the new “Futures for Frontliners” campaign, essential workers in Michigan who put in time during the height of the coronavirus lockdown and don’t have a degree are eligible for free college at community colleges.

“This initiative is Michigan’s way of expressing gratitude to essential workers for protecting public health and keeping our state running,” Whitmer said in a statement. “Whether it was stocking shelves, delivering supplies, picking up trash, manufacturing PPE or providing medical care, you were there for us. Now, this is your chance to pursue the degree or training you’ve been dreaming about to help you and your own family succeed.”

Young said the college is excited to begin working toward welcoming those future students.

“Our goal is to help as many students as we can,” she said. “This will be a great opportunity.”

One Michigan county tells the story of a nation plagued by water pollution

By Jane Johnston & Circle of Blue • 13 hours ago



Pollution from agriculture and leaky septic tanks has produced an excess of algae in the Pine River.

J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

Farms housing thousands of animals are one of several sources contaminating the Pine River and dividing a mid-Michigan community.

Murray Borrello, wearing khakis and a loose-fitting brown button-up, walked down a backroad during the summer of 2019 listening to the sounds of the woods. Water from the Pine River flowed slowly beneath him as he looked out over a bridge.

“Oh, I hear a frog,” the Alma College geology and environmental studies professor said. “That’s a good sign.”

Borrello has been monitoring the Pine River for nearly two decades, so he is attuned to the marks of a healthy ecosystem. He and his team of students and community members test water samples from the 103-mile-long river and its tributaries for an array of pollution indicators: nitrogen and phosphorus, bacteria and dissolved oxygen. Since he began the project in 2003, Borrello said contamination in the watershed has only gotten worse.

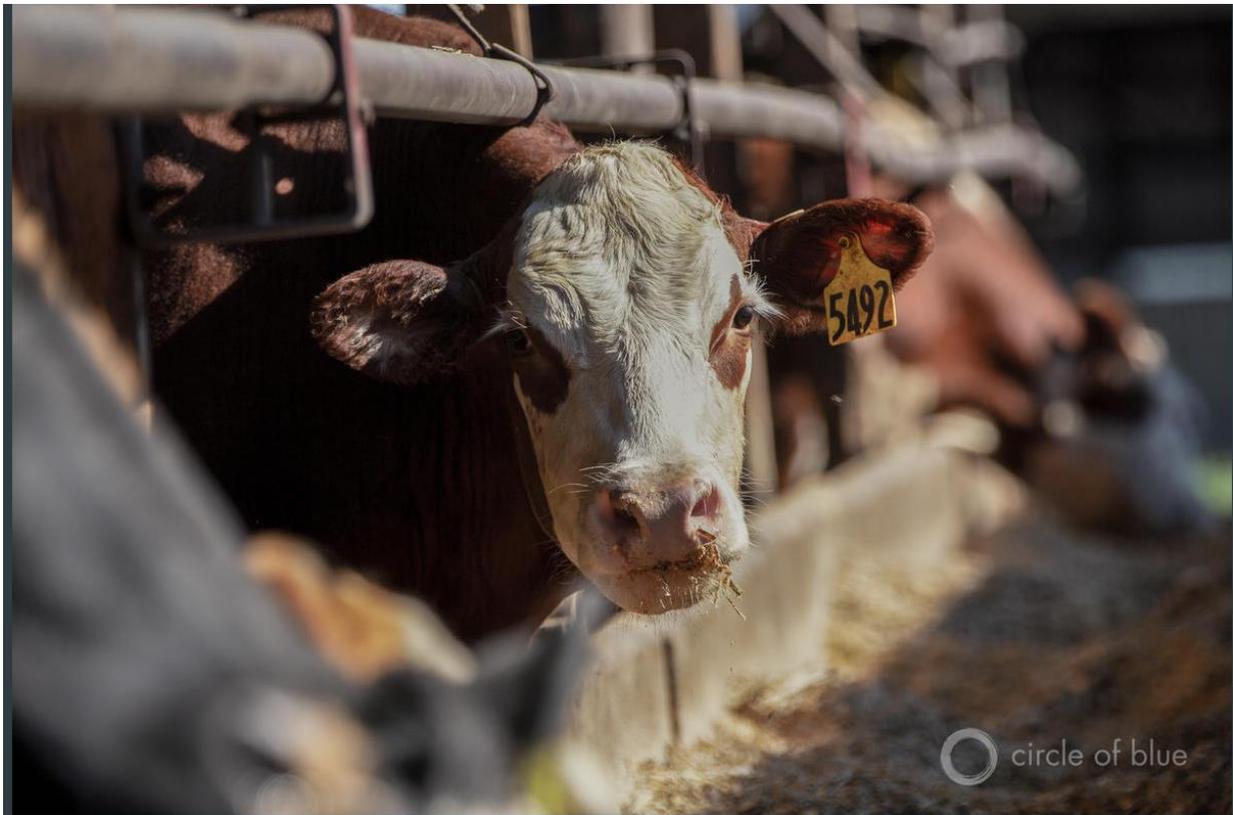


The 103-mile-long Pine River runs through Gratiot County, a Michigan county that is home to more cows and pigs than people.

Credit J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

To Borrello, the source of the problem seems obvious. “The river is loaded with nutrients, it’s loaded with bacteria,” he told Circle of Blue. “We see it upstream and downstream, we can look at where it’s coming from. It’s coming from application sites of manure, and it’s coming from CAFOs themselves.”

CAFOs, or concentrated animal feeding operations, are industrial farms that raise a large number of livestock or poultry. Critics of the operations, like Borrello and the [Sierra Club](#), point to a growing body of research that reveals the dismal effects CAFOs can have on water and air quality—and on the communities around them.



Manure from cows, if mishandled, can end up in our nation's waterways, killing wildlife and vegetation by producing an excess of nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen.

Credit J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

The [Iowa Policy Project released](#) a report in 2018 on the intense impact the growing number of CAFOs have had on waterways in the United States. They found evidence proving excess nutrients from CAFOs, like the ones found in the Pine River, can kill any life present for miles around a body of water. If ingested by humans, high levels of nitrate can cause birth defects, cancer, liver damage and a wide range of allergic reactions.

The Pine River is at the heart of this pollution debate. The river runs through five mid-Michigan counties, including Gratiot County, where Alma College is located and where Borrello's team does most of its monitoring. Gratiot County is home to 27 CAFOs—the third highest of any county in Michigan—according to [data](#) from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE).

CAFOs aren't the only suspected source of pollution in the Pine River, whose history with contamination dates back to the 1930s. Locals can recall a time when high levels of dangerous chemicals like [DDT](#) were found in the river, dumped there by Velsicol Chemical Company, which operated from a riverside factory in St. Louis, Michigan. The company was also responsible for the infamous [PBB disaster](#) from the 1970s, in which toxic fire retardants were inadvertently mixed into livestock feed, resulting in one of the worst mass poisonings in U.S. history. The site where Velsicol once stood is now one of three EPA-designated [Superfund](#) sites in St. Louis.

But as [cleanup](#) of those legacy chemicals begins, new threats to the Pine River are taking center stage: dysfunctional [septic](#) tanks for one, but also runoff from local farms and CAFOs. These contemporary pollutants are the center of lively arguments about water quality in the 21st century, a discussion whose consequences can be measured in regulatory costs, environmental degradation, and farm profits. How much waste comes from any one pollution source is highly contested -- and contentious.

Plagued by pollution

Nothing about the pollution in the Pine River is particularly unique. Contamination from leaky sewage systems is common throughout Michigan, the only state [without a comprehensive septic tank management law](#). Agriculture, on the other hand, is the country's leading cause of river pollution.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/CZqCVKgopts" frameborder="0" allow="accelerometer; autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Pollution more broadly is affecting waterways in other parts of the country, too. An [investigation](#) from 2017 showed that nearly a fifth of all Americans were exposed to unsafe drinking water from decades of industrial dumping, farming pollution, and deterioration of water distribution pipes.

Gratiot County residents aren't the only ones dealing with farm pollution. Every year residents living around Lake Erie experience harmful algal blooms due to agricultural runoff. In [Ohio](#), large-scale dairy and livestock farms that are too small to be classified as a CAFO aren't regulated. Manure from cows, hogs and chickens wash into the Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie.

CAFO waste can pollute surface water with an excess of phosphorus and nitrogen, two nutrients that cause algal blooms. In a process called [eutrophication](#), algal growth cuts off sunlight and robs the water of oxygen, either killing aquatic life or forcing fish and amphibians to migrate to an area with more of the dissolved gas. Borrello witnesses this process occur year after year in the Pine River. At the end of the summer, he said, the river is caked in green slime.

“Even just simply looking at the river, seeing the algae in the aquatic vegetation choking the river, and then finding some excuse of why we shouldn't be changing our practices is just beyond me,” Borrello said. In Gratiot County, it has been too easy for locals, government officials, and polluters themselves to turn a blind eye.

Tim Keeton, a biology professor at Alma College who is part of Borrello's monitoring team, says the biggest roadblock in their work is getting around the Michigan Farm Bureau.

The American Farm Bureau is a national organization, with chapters in all 50 states, that represents the American agricultural industry. Its influence as a [lobbying group](#) can be compared to groups like the [National Rifle Association](#). In Gratiot County, Borrello and Keeton said the Farm Bureau has done everything it can to stop the public from blaming CAFOs for pollution in the Pine River.

“If you talk to the Farm Bureau, they would say that that's all leaky septic tanks,” Keeton told Circle of Blue. “If you talk to people that kind of sit down and do the math and study the environment around here, they're going to say, no, it's got to be mostly feedlot manure applications.”

Laura Campbell, the director of agricultural ecology for the Michigan Farm Bureau, told Circle of Blue that based on a [watershed management plan](#) for the county published last December, there's evidence to support both theories.

The goal of the watershed management plan was to give the community a clearer idea of what was contaminating their water so that they could put together an effective plan to clean it up, Julie Spencer, administrator of the Gratiot Conservation District, told Circle of Blue. The plan does that, and now “there's no excuse to continue polluting the river,” she said.

Spencer said she thinks it's important to focus on both animal and human sources of pollution, which has made her unpopular among many in the community. “My goal is clean water. Period,” she said. “Whatever it takes to clean the Pine River is my goal. I will not take sides and I will help anyone who asks for my help.”

Campbell said that the findings in the plan can help the community come together, instead of continuing to point fingers at one another.

That includes everyone, even local farmers.

Farming: Industry or family business?

Matt Cary is a third-generation farmer at Cary Pioneer Farms, which started out as a small farm. Over the generations, the family acquired more land, transforming the farm into a large-scale operation, growing crops on 4,100 acres and raising over 2,000 cattle every year, earning it CAFO status.



Matt Cary is a third-generation farmer in Alma, Michigan.
Credit J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

Cary, who now runs the business alongside his father and his brother, owes the majority of his success to his grandfather, who started the farm in 1944 and was what Cary described as nothing short of a “visionary” who was ahead of the curve on more recent sustainability measures like soil testing and spot application of manure.

Farming is in the family’s blood, said Cary, who has worked on the farm since he was 16. “I couldn’t imagine any other way of life,” he said, concluding that at the end of the day, they’re just “a large family farm.”

This echoes the Farm Bureau’s stance. “Permitted livestock are not huge soulless corporate industries,” Campbell wrote in an email. “Our permitted farms are family-owned businesses just like smaller farms.”

Keeton disagrees. “The regulations that these feedlots have to deal with are very different than what most industries have to deal with,” he said, adding that any farm with thousands of animals on it is “an industry and it needs to be treated as such.”

Regulations for CAFOs in Michigan are different than those for smaller farms. The permit for CAFOs includes rules on when a farmer is allowed to apply manure and fertilizer on frozen ground and how much manure and fertilizer is allowed to be applied on farm fields at all.



Increased soil testing and spot application of manure can help reduce agriculture's environmental impact.

Credit J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

The newest permit, revised this year, bans application on frozen ground and considerably limits application on fields. It is currently being [contested](#) by groups like the Michigan Farm Bureau. They, along with six other agricultural advocacy groups and more than 160 farms, submitted a petition in late May of this year, arguing that the regulations overstep EGLE’s regulatory authority. Until a decision on the newest permit is reached, regulations from 2015 will still be in effect.

Campbell said the Michigan Farm Bureau feels that the permit’s requirements are, at the very least, hardly backed by science and that the costs of keeping up with the new standards could put some farms out of business entirely.

Cary shared the Farm Bureau's concerns. "I'll be the first to tell you, some regulation is not a bad thing, because there's people out there that need that push a little more than others," he said. But when such strict regulations are imposed, it leaves farmers little time to prepare for change, he said.

Cary said he's worried about what the future of farming will look like, but he's worried about the environment too. "It's really important for us to be running our operation for the future of our kids and for our community," he said. "But we're just like anybody else. We're trying to raise a family, and we drink all the same water."

Bruce Washburn, an environmental quality specialist from EGLE's Water Resources Division, told Circle of Blue that the regulations are intended to minimize pollution in waterways like the Saginaw Bay, into which the Pine River eventually flows.

Borrello and other environmental groups argue that the permit doesn't go far enough to protect Michigan's waterways. However, neither he nor Keeton blames the farmers. "It's our conviction that regulations are the problem," Keeton said.

Borrello does not anticipate that lawmakers – of any party – will take action to reduce farm pollution. "I have no confidence that anybody, Democrat, Republican, Independent, the governor, the attorney general," he said, "has any desire whatsoever to do anything positive related to protecting our waters from agricultural impact."

The role of CAFOs in the national food system is even being called into question. At the end of 2019, Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the [Farm System Reform Act](#), which would eliminate CAFOs entirely by 2040. The bill gained support from Democratic colleagues Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, but it has not moved out of committee.

What little faith he does have left, Borrello puts in the next generation. "The only hope I have is that the young people will start voting and start asking questions that specifically say, 'If we vote for you, will you change how agriculture is regulated?'"

Farms that started out small, like the Carys', "want to be good stewards," Borrello said. "I think they are doing everything to the letter of the law. And the law just doesn't protect the environment."

The Great Lakes News Collaborative includes Bridge Michigan; Circle of Blue; Great Lakes Now at Detroit Public Television; and Michigan Radio, Michigan's NPR News Leader; who work together to bring audiences news and information about the impact of climate change, pollution, and aging infrastructure on the Great Lakes and drinking water. This independent journalism is supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

CORONAVIRUS

14th Isabella resident dies of COVID-19

Sunday night death is fifth in September

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
Multimedia journalist

An elderly man who was hospitalized with COVID-19 died Sunday night, bringing the county's deaths to 14, with five in September.

September becomes the second month with five deaths. The first was April, when the disease killed four during an outbreak at the Isabella County Medical Care Facility. Two died in March, and one each in June and July.

The number of cases in Isabella County increased by 14 over the weekend, going from 621 cumulatively reported as of Friday afternoon to 635 on Monday. The county crossed the 600 case mark last Tuesday.

The elderly man's death was not connected to cases stemming from CMU's return to campus. The university reported Monday morning that its cumulative case numbers increased by 16 last week, for a cumulative number of 233.

COVID » PAGE 2

COVID

FROM PAGE 1

CMU's numbers are narrowly focused on just cases that can be affirmatively linked to members of the university community. They do not reflect secondary infections caused by close contact with COVID-positive members of the CMU community.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services updates school outbreaks every Monday. CMU is the only Isabella County school currently with an outbreak. While CMU's official tally is 233, the state is reporting 320 undergraduate student cases and four cases among graduate students.

There are currently two school-related outbreaks in Gratiot County. The outbreak associated with Luce Road Early Childhood Education Center grew by eight over last week to 31, involving both students and staff. The previous week, the growth was 17. A declining number of new cases is commonly the profile of a cluster that has been contained.

The school was closed earlier this month, but reopened Sept. 18 based on the guidance of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

The state is still reporting 12 cases at Alma College, but the college's COVID-19 dashboard on Monday reported 21 cumulative cases.

Gratiot County's cumulative total number of cases Monday was 238, up seven from Friday's 231. Fifteen Gratiot County residents have died.

Elsewhere in mid-Michigan, an outbreak involving six students and staff at Carson City-Crystal Elementary. The Greenville Daily News reported over the weekend that amid the outbreak a 53-year-old woman suddenly died and may have been Montcalm County's fifth death.

The paper reported that Mid-Michigan District Health Department confirmed that a woman in her 50s died Thursday or Friday.

Montcalm County has 298 confirmed cases of the disease, up 14 over the weekend.

Cases at Ferris State University increased by 28, from 57 to 85. Mecosta County's cases increased over the weekend by nine, from 193 to 202. Three people have died.

An outbreak at Midland County's Northwood University increased by 16 over the last week, rising from 55 to 71. The county's cumulative case numbers increased 15 over the weekend, from 499 to 514. Eleven people have died there.

There are also no school-related outbreaks in Gladwin County, where cases increased by five, from 84 to 89. Two people have died there.

There are no school-related outbreaks currently in Clare County. At 103 confirmed cases and four deaths, it remains unchanged over the weekend.

Statewide, another 1,308 cases were reported Monday for a cumulative total of 122,735. Those numbers reflect that the state has stopped announcing numbers over the weekend. Those are a two-day average of 654 cases. Eight people died for a total of 6,731.

Talent & Education

A rural Michigan district has 15 COVID cases, one death, and few answers



There are 15 coronavirus cases and one death connected to Carson City-Crystal Area Schools (Shutterstock)

 September 29, 2020

 [Ron French](#)

 [Talent & Education](#)

Carson City-Crystal Area Schools in Montcalm County was a month into face-to-face instruction this semester when officials learned of the first coronavirus case connected to the district. A staff member contacted the district last week to say she had tested positive.

One week later, the number of COVID-19 cases in this rural district of less than 900 students had jumped to 15, a 53-year-old teaching assistant was dead, and students were back to learning at home.

- The latest: [Michigan coronavirus unemployment, map, curve, updated COVID-19 news](#)
- Dashboard: [Michigan coronavirus testing numbers, trends, COVID-19 data](#)

The rapid spread — and the death of a woman described by a county health official as otherwise healthy — is a sobering example of the difficulty schools face in trying to fend off a deadly virus that can spread just by breathing.

“Carson City-Crystal has done a great job (in taking health precautions for COVID-19),” said Marcus Cheatham, health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Montcalm, Gratiot and Clinton counties. “They’ve done everything we could have wished.

“The lesson here is that even when you do your best, this disease can get out of control and it can kill people,” Cheatham said.

“The lesson here is that even when you do your best, this disease can get out of control and it can kill people.” — Marcus Cheatham, Mid-Michigan District Health Department

Cheatham confirmed that the staff member died from coronavirus last week. He did not release the woman’s name, but [media reports](#) identified her as Michelle Lynn McCrackin, a mother of five from Carson City.

According to [her obituary](#), McCrackin was a paraprofessional at Carson City-Crystal Area Schools who assisted classroom teachers by working with students to improve reading and math skills. She was also the local teacher union president.

The McCrackin family did not immediately respond to a request for comment passed to them through the Lux and Schnepf Funeral Home in Carson City on Tuesday.

Carson City-Crystal reopened schools for the fall semester on Aug. 24. The majority of students returned to classrooms for the first time since mid-March, when Michigan's public and private schools were shuttered to try to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

About a quarter of the district's students chose to continue with homebound learning, similar to how students finished the 2019-20 school year, Supt. John Sattler told a community newspaper, [the Daily News](#), last week.

Sattler did not return a request from Bridge Michigan for comment Tuesday.

On Sept. 22, the staffer told the district she had tested positive for COVID-19, according to Cheatham of the health department. One day later, three more staff members and a student tested positive, and the school district closed its buildings and switched to fully remote learning through at least Oct. 4.

McCrackin died three days after her diagnosis.

Cheatham said there are currently no hospitalizations or other deaths connected to the outbreak among students and staff in the district. He said it's unclear whether the woman contracted the virus through her interactions at the school, or if others contracted COVID-19 from her.

Cheatham said that while connections between the cases are not clear, he said he believes there are enough positive cases to conclude there is "community spread" in the school district.

By Tuesday afternoon, the count of confirmed coronavirus cases among students and staff at Carson City-Crystal was 15. "Don't hold me to that," Cheatham told Bridge Michigan in an interview.

"By the time you print it, it will be wrong. This is changing by the hour."

7K and *still* growing

Our members have doubled this year from **3,500** to **7,000**. Join the thousands of Michigan residents who care about local nonprofit news.

I WILL PAY FOR QUALITY MICHIGAN NEWS

I'm already a member!

Until now, Montcalm County had not witnessed a large increase in cases in recent weeks. The past couple weeks, the seven-day average of new cases was three or four. That could be changing — there were 11 new cases reported in this county of 63,000 on Monday alone, and another 13 Tuesday.

“My world is on fire,” Cheatham said. “It feels like we’re starting to lose our grip on what’s going on, because there are so many outbreaks in so many parts of the community.”

Cheatham said the public needs to understand that just a handful of cases can bring a school district to its knees. One student who tests positive can send a 30-person classroom into quarantine for two weeks; one classroom teacher may come into close contact with numerous other teachers, forcing them all to stay home.

McCrackin’s job, for example, took her into multiple classrooms, working with numerous students at different grade levels.

The countywide career center for technical education has also closed for in-person instruction for now, Cheatham said, because some Carson City-Crystal students attend the center.

“There are probably hundreds of students quarantined” in the district, Cheatham said. “They have no staff or students to fill their classrooms. And then you have secondary spread to family members.”

Across Michigan, there were 46 K-12 schools with new or ongoing coronavirus outbreaks as of last Thursday, according to [a state report released Monday](#). But Cheatham said those reports are a significant undercount of schools impacted by the virus.

He said that “well over half” of school districts in his three-county health district have coronavirus cases and had to quarantine students who had close contact with infected people. The state report only includes schools with “outbreaks,” which are defined as two or more cases connected in time and place to the same source of infection. If one student tests positive and a whole classroom is quarantined at home for a week, that school is not disclosed in the state report.

That may soon change for K-12 schools. On Friday, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer issued an order that requires Michigan schools to [directly publish notification of coronavirus cases](#), starting Oct. 7.

Details of where that information will be published, and how often, have not yet been released. As written, the order applies to all confirmed coronavirus cases, not just those defined as outbreaks.

Related Articles:





Michigan schools still struggle with public disclosure of COVID cases

September 30, 2020 | [Ron French](#), [Robin Erb](#), [Kathryn Dugal](#)

How much you'll learn about coronavirus cases in your student's school depends on where you live. A Bridge Michigan analysis shows parents still can't depend on schools or local health departments to voluntarily alert them to outbreaks.



COVID outbreaks spiking in Michigan K-12 schools and colleges

September 28, 2020 | [Ron French](#)

The number of K-12 schools with coronavirus outbreaks jumped from 28 to 46 schools in just a week. And there are now over 3,800 confirmed cases at colleges and universities across Michigan, numbers that are likely an undercount.

Whitmer orders Michigan schools to tell the public about COVID cases

September 25, 2020 | [Robin Erb](#), [Ron French](#)

Pressure mounted for more than a month on the administration to require more immediate public notifications of coronavirus outbreaks at Michigan schools as students returned for the fall term.



CORONAVIRUS

Gratiot COVID cases jump by 15 in one day

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

Cases of COVID-19 jumped in Gratiot County by 15 in one day, increasing from 238 Monday to 253 Tuesday.

There was no explanation immediately available for the spike. No additional cases were announced in long-term care facilities on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 website.

An email was sent seeking information to MMDHD, which oversees Gratiot County, but it wasn't responded to by press time.

There are currently two outbreaks at schools — Alma College and Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center — but both of those appear to be in the process of being contained.

The Luce Road ECLC outbreak was discussed during a meeting of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department's board of health, reported the Greenville Daily News Tuesday.

“We had an elementary school (Luce Road Elementary School in Gratiot County) where there is a provision in the state guidance that strongly recommends face coverings for K through 5 students if they're staying with their class at all times and we did have a large outbreak in that elementary school where they had left it up to their teachers regarding face covering use and there was not good face covering use at all, even among some of the teachers,” the Daily News quoted MMDHD Medical Director Jennifer Morse as saying. “Since that outbreak, they (the state of Michigan) have now required face covering use among everybody, even the students. We recommend that everybody be wearing masks regardless of what the rules are.”

COVID » PAGE 2

COVID

FROM PAGE 1

Gratiot County's 40,000-person population is the smallest of the three counties covered by MMDHD. The other two are Montcalm County, with approximately 64,000 people; and Clinton County, with approximately 79,000 people.

Of the three it also has the fewest overall cases of COVID-19. As of Tuesday, Montcalm had 312 and Clinton had 609. But of the three, it has the most deaths with 15, compared to 14 in Clinton and six in Montcalm.

Gratiot County an outlier on a day where Isabella County saw only two additional cases, increasing from 631

to 633, with 14 deaths. Clare County increased from 103 Monday to 104, with four deaths.

Mecosta County had an additional six cases, increasing from 202 to 208, with three deaths. Midland County had three additional cases, increasing from 514 to 517, with 11 deaths. Gladwin County increased by one case, from 89 to 90. Two people have died there.

Statewide, an additional 898 cases were announced for a cumulative total of 123,633, and an additional 20 deaths for a total of 6,751. Four of those deaths came during a review of death records.

Eric Baerren is a multimedia journalist for The Morning Sun in Mt. Pleasant.

Daily News

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Greenville schools OK extended COVID-19 Learning Plan

BRANDONSCHREUR
bschreur@thedailynews.cc

GREENVILLE — In keeping up with the state of Michigan's requirements, the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education unanimously approved an extended COVID-19 Learning Plan during a special meeting Monday.

The plan, Superintendent

Linda Van Houten and Assistant Superintendent Michelle Blaszczyński both explained, does not replace the district's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response (Return to Learn) Plan that passed in August. Rather, the extended COVID-19 Learning Plan is an addition to the original plan that provides assurances on educational goals, instructional delivery, grading and equitable

access.

"As we return to school in the fall, our first priority will be to ensure the well-being of all members of our school community," the extended COVID-19 Learning Plan reads. "We anticipate that many students will be behind in learning and teachers will need opportunities to collaborate with

Continues on Page 4



The Greenville Public Schools Board of Education meets in-person for a special meeting on Monday to approve an extended COVID-19 Learning Plan for the district. Other meeting attendees were asked to attend virtually over Zoom. — DN
Photo | Brandon Schreur

Greenville schools OK extended Learning Plan

Continued from Page 1

each other as they examine student work and determine what comes next in the learning for each student.

"As a cooperating partner of the community, Greenville Public Schools will assure all students the education necessary to participate as responsible citizens in an ever-changing world. Due to COVID-19, this Extended Learning Plan is necessary to assure the collective ownership of all students' success, despite the changing circumstances. Whether in person, in distance or fully online, GPS will maximize attendance, engagement, instructional delivery and achievement. The modality of learning may vary according to need; however, rigor, relevance and relationships will remain the foundation of GPS education."

According to Van Houten, the most notable change made in the extended plan has to do with the district's educational goals.

"This was a direct relation in needing to meet with a group of individuals we were required to have input from," she noted. "The input we received from them was increased rigor. We were glad to be able to work with that group, get their input and, as a result, make those changes."

The educational goals, Blaszczyński explained, involve bringing all K-8 students into the 45th percentile or above in growth proficiency for math and reading.

"With input from the team and I believe it was noted from the board as well, we changed our thresholds," Blaszczyński told the board. "The 45th percentile and above is marked as effective (growth). The 70th percentile and higher would be highly effective growth... That feedback holds us to a higher level of rigor. We want to make sure that our students are growing at a steep trajectory, as compared to the nation."

Van Houten also touched on some of the safety measures and how the district plans to continue offering in-person instruction for as long as they're able to.

"We've seen these protocols in the first plan that we did, the Continuity of Learning Plan from back earlier this year," Van Houten said. "(This plan) had to explain a little bit more about what in-person looks like, so it talks about the schedule, cohorting and the block schedule we have over at the high school."

According to the extended plan, "cohorting" takes place at all levels at the district and multiple protocols and schedules that limit transitions are being implemented.

"Students will be separated by cohorts for special classes at the elementary level and social distancing will be adhered to," the plan reads. "In addition, at the elementary level, all students will be eating in the classroom. At the secondary level, we are providing multiple places for lunches in order to allow for social distancing as much as possible. Students go directly to a class at the beginning of the day and teachers supervise the hallways in order to help discourage social gatherings in-between classes."

The plan also states that Greenville Public Schools will prioritize in-person instruction with pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students when in-person instruction is deemed safe and that Van Houten is in weekly consultation with the Mid-Michigan Health Department to analyze COVID data.

Van Houten said that the district must have the extended plan in place and sent over to the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) by Oct. 1. The Board of Education is also required to revisit the plan monthly, per the state's requirements.

"The (MAISD) will review it to make sure all the pieces are there and then they will turn that over to the state department," Van Houten explained. "This is what our

funding will be contingent on. We have to have this in place to receive funding."

"Looking through some of these things today, it does seem that we've done this multiple times," Treasurer Jim Anderson noted.

Secretary Ron Billmeier asked what happens to the plan once it's turned over to the state.

"I think they're just housing them," Van Houten answered.

"They're not doing anything with them?" Billmeier said. "I just wanted to have a better understanding of what they're doing. I'm not taking away anything of what we're doing."

"It's just compliance to make sure that you have it in place," Van Houten explained. "I think the intent is to keep staff and students safe, to show a commitment towards that and ensure that protocols are in place."

Van Houten and Board President Norice Rasmussen also noted the plan would be made public to the community in case any parents wanted to know any precise information about how the district is handling this ever-changing situation.

A motion to approve the extended COVID-19 Learning Plan passed unanimously among board members.

Daily News

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Health officials talk school COVID-19 outbreaks

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

A Carson City-Crystal Area Schools coronavirus outbreak was discussed in detail during last week's Mid-Michigan District Health Department's Board of Health meeting, just one day before a CC-C paraprofessional died from COVID-19.



Marcus Cheatham

Michelle McCrackin, 53, of Carson City died from COVID last Thursday night — one day after the CC-C school district closed down and switched over to virtual learning in response to a COVID outbreak.

McCrackin was an employee of CC-C schools for the past 14 years and most recently worked as a Title 1 paraprofessional for kindergarten through sixth grade, according to CC-C Superintendent John Sattler. The health department confirmed a Montcalm County woman in her 50s died from COVID on Thursday night/Friday morning.

The CC-C outbreak was discussed at length during a Board of Health meeting last Wednesday, Sept. 23 (the day before McCrackin died).

“It was a parapro who provided assistance at all of the school buildings, basically,” Health Officer Marcus Cheatham summarized. “It was probably a situation that we wouldn’t recommend they repeat. If the parapro goes from the elementary school to the middle school to the high school and that’s the person who winds up being positive, you can see the threat to the whole operation. You want the parapro to stay in one place and get a different parapro for the other buildings.

“The good news is Carson City-Crystal is very responsive to us and they’re really being helpful,” he added.

Cheatham said other school districts have been more problematic to work with.

“Pewamo-Westphalia has been on quarantine for two weeks and it has been a very difficult experience for that school district,” Cheatham said. “The Board of Education, the administration and the parents have just been tied in knots

about the large number of the students that were on quarantine. The parents have been on both sides of the issue — some screaming that the quarantines were unnecessary and the others being furious with the parents who have been trying to get their kids off quarantine and send them back to school, saying ‘you’re going to make a kid sick.’

“They are off quarantine today (Sept. 23),” he said. “Hopefully Pewamo-Westphalia will be calming down going forward.”

Health Department Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse clarified that the CC-C parapro was properly wearing a face mask while on the job.

“One of the main issues with her was that she was helping children with testing so she was extremely close to them, kind of face to face with them at the desk for long periods of time,” Morse noted. “They’re (face masks) are not meant to protect the person who’s healthy and they’re not 100 percent effective.

“We had an elementary school (Luce Road Elementary School in Gratiot County) where there is a provision in the state guidance that strongly recommends face coverings for K through 5 students if they’re staying with their class at all times and we did have a large outbreak in that elementary school where they had left it up to their teachers regarding face covering use and there was not good face covering use at all, even among some of the teachers,” Morse said. “Since that outbreak, they (the state of Michigan) have now required face covering use among everybody, even the students. We recommend that everybody be wearing masks regardless of what the rules are.”

Morse said her husband works in the education field.

“He comes home every day with stories,” she said. “There’s two issues — there’s unwillingness to change behavior and there’s unwillingness to accept that this is a problem by so many people. There’s such a challenge.”

Alma College and Luce Road Elementary School, both in Gratiot County, are both listed by the state of Michigan as having COVID outbreaks (via michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173_102480—,00.html). Luce Road school was listed Sept. 14 with 23 cases involving staff and students, while Alma College was listed Sept. 21 with 12 student cases.

Cheatham shared details about some of the pushback the health department’s disease control nurses are receiving from the public when working on contact tracing involving schools.

“We had to rotate one nurse out,” Cheatham said. “She could not stand the — I’m just going to be blunt here so you guys know what’s been happening — the verbal abuse and harassment that she was getting from community members. She couldn’t stand it anymore and she asked to be relieved so we did that. I do not want that to be the conditions under which my employees are working when they’re doing exactly what they’re supposed to do. It’s so heated in the community.”

Cheatham elaborated on the challenges of fighting COVID while schools are in session.

“Some of the superintendents do not want to make the decisions,” he noted. “They say, ‘I’m not an epidemiologist and I know the consequences of my decisions will be enormous and I feel unqualified to make these decisions.’ We’re trying to support our superintendents either way and if they want to be creative in how they respond to this, we’re trying to give them the assistance they need to make those decisions wisely.”

Cheatham said he has been meeting with local intermediate school district superintendents — including Montcalm County ISD Superintendent Kyle Hamlin — to ask for help.

“We said, ‘Will you please tell your principals and school superintendents that their job is to support the health department in this contact tracing? Moreover, will you tell them to tell their parents to support the health department?’” he recounted. “And I think this helped, I think it helped a lot, when you look at how Carson City-Crystal responded. We’re trying to prevent the situation that Carson City-Crystal just went through where they had to go back to virtual.”

In between last week’s Finance Committee meeting and full board meeting, Cheatham addressed the challenges of school quarantine directly to Gratiot County Commissioner George Bailey, who is chairman of the Board of Health.

“Commissioner Bailey, I have to let you know that we have been told — we don’t know if this will happen or not — but we’ve been told my some members of the public that they plan to attend public comment virtually and tell you terrible stories about our contact tracing and what a bad job we’re doing,” Cheatham said. “It could be a circus. Some of the school leadership has not been helpful and has shared some of the negative attitudes that some of the public has.”

“It’s a tough situation for everybody,” Bailey noted.

“It really is,” Cheatham agreed. “It’s really hard on these parents to have their kids at home while school is open.”

“What I feel is the poverty level in Gratiot County is close to 40 percent, it’s about 38 percent, I think,” Bailey noted. “So when they decide we have a COVID case and we’re going to put our protocols in place, people get upset because they have to go to work and they have a child to take care of. You’ve got parents who have to go to work, you’ve got employers that demand they go to work and you’ve got a child that needs to be taken care of.

“It’s a storm, man, it is a storm,” Bailey declared. “I don’t blame these people for getting upset. We don’t have what I can systems in place to handle this unusual time that we’re in. Unfortunately, most of these people don’t have the flexibility within their own schedule to do this. It’s too rigid, they have to go to work.

“I know what their plight is, I just don’t know how to fix it,” he said. “I don’t have any answers.”

Daily News

Friday, October 2, 2020

Career center morning session moves to distance learning

Submitted by the Montcalm Area Career Center

STANTON — All morning programs held at the Montcalm Area Career Center (MACC) moved to a virtual learning platform earlier this week and will be taught remotely through Oct. 7.

Students will return to the building for in person learning on Oct. 8. The afternoon programs are not impacted by this schedule change and will continue to be held on site as usual.

Kyle Hamlin, superintendent of Montcalm Area Intermediate School District, indicated this decision was made in collaboration with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department after learning that five people had tested positive for COVID-19 and sever-

al others were to be quarantined. Following consultation with health department officials, the move to online learning was done to provide the highest safeguard to students and staff and help prevent further spread. All contact tracing has been completed and anyone affected has already been contacted. This situation impacted only the morning programs. The afternoon programs were not exposed.

“We worked hand-in-hand with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department throughout this entire process and followed their guidance in making this decision,” Hamlin said. “We felt this was a critical step to take toward keeping our students, staff, and their families safe and prevent further spread. We look forward to welcoming our

students back into the building on Oct. 8.”

The MACC is a part of the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District. It provides career and technical education for high school juniors and seniors who attend local school districts in Montcalm County.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever/chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste/smell, sore throat, congestion/runny nose, nausea/vomiting, or diarrhea. Anyone with symptoms should be tested. Visit mi.gov/coronavirustest for a testing location or work with your primary care provider to obtain a test.

More information can also be found at www.mmdhd.org/coronavirus or through the Centers for Disease Control.

Local COVID death not listed on death certificate, despite federal requirement

ELISABETH WALDON
ewaldon@thedailynews.cc

CARSON CITY — A Carson City-Crystal Area Schools paraprofessional is the youngest person in Montcalm County to die from a COVID-related death; however, COVID is not listed as a cause or contributing factor on the death certificate, despite U.S. federal agency requirements that state otherwise.

Michelle McCrackin, 53, of Carson City died Sept. 25 at Sparrow Carson Hospital in Carson City. Her death certificate lists respiratory failure, cardiac arrest and pneumonia as causes and factors of death — but nothing about COVID.

McCrackin was the sixth COVID-related death in Montcalm County. A seventh COVID-related death in Montcalm County occurred the following day, Sept. 26.

The CC-C school district shut down the day before McCrackin's death after it became the first school district in Montcalm County to experience a COVID outbreak — defined by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services as two or more cases that are unrelated. Superintendent John Sattler switched

Continues on Page 3A

Local COVID death not listed on death certificate

Continued from Page 1A

the district from in-person learning to virtual/distance learning starting Sept. 26 until at least Sunday, Oct. 4.

Sattler did not return messages from the Daily News on Thursday and Friday seeking comment about whether the district would return to in-person learning next week, but a staff member at CC-C Central Office told the Daily News the district plans to return to in-person learning on Thursday, Oct. 8. The next regular CC-C Board of Education meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Oct. 12.

McCrackin was the youngest COVID-related death in Montcalm County as the six other deaths all involved people who were in their 70s or older. A majority of the COVID-related deaths in Montcalm County were people from other counties who died at Spectrum Health United Hospital in Greenville or Mission Point of Greenville.

The Daily News reviewed the death certificates of all COVID-related deaths in Montcalm County at the Montcalm County Clerk's Office (death certificates are public records). All death certificates but McCrackin's listed COVID as a cause or factor, including:

- **April 6:** A 74-year-old Fenwick (Ionia County) man who died at United Hospital. His cause of death is listed as acute hypoxic respiratory failure and COVID-19 infection.

- **April 6:** An 87-year-old Cedar Springs (Kent County) man who died at United Hospital. His cause of death is listed as acute hypoxic respiratory failure and COVID-19.

- **June 5:** A 90-year-old Norton Shores (Muskegon County) man who died at United Hospital. His cause of death is listed as acute hypoxic respiratory failure and COVID-19.

- **June 11:** A 93-year-old Kentwood (Kent County) woman who died at Mission Point of Greenville. Her cause of death is listed as dementia and COVID-19.

- **Sept. 12:** A 71-year-old Greenville man died at United Hospital. His cause of death is listed as stage 4 cancer with complications from COVID-19.

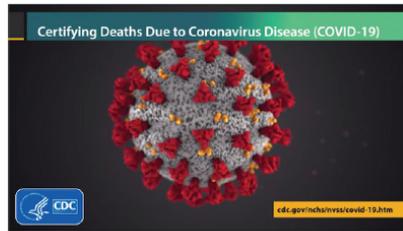
- **Sept. 25:** McCrackin was the sixth COVID-related death in Montcalm County.

- **Sept. 26:** A Montcalm County man in his 80s died a COVID-related death, according to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). That death certificate has not yet been filed with the county clerk's office.

MMDHD Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse told the Daily News that McCrackin's death is confirmed to be COVID-related. Morse declined to say whether McCrackin had tested positive for COVID but said the criteria for a confirmed COVID-related death was met, which includes one of the following: individuals who had a confirmed COVID infection and are classified as deceased during the case investigation or have COVID indicated as a cause of death on their death certificate or die within 30 days of COVID infection and their manner of death is listed as natural (as opposed to accidental, such as death from a car accident).

Morse said questions about an individual's death certificate need to be directed to the physician who completed the death certificate.

Dr. Rashmi Juneja, who was on call at Sparrow Carson Hospital at the time of McCrackin's death, is listed on McCrackin's



A Montcalm County woman's death was COVID-related according to the local health department, but her death certificate does not list COVID as a cause or a factor — which goes against federal guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) regarding reporting and coding COVID-19 deaths (per information found at cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/coding-and-reporting.htm). — CDC graphic

death certificate as the certifying physician. The Daily News left a message seeking comment about why COVID was not listed on McCrackin's death certificate, but the doctor did not return the message left at Michigan Primary Care Partners in Big Rapids, where the doctor works.

The Daily News asked Sparrow Health System to comment on why COVID wasn't listed on McCrackin's death certificate.

"Due to patient privacy laws, we cannot comment on this specific case," Sparrow Spokesman John Foren said.

Morse directed the Daily News to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) website, where information can be found about reporting and coding COVID-19 deaths (cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/coding-and-reporting.htm). The CDC is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"In a public health emergency such as COVID-19, death certificate information is critical in measuring the pandemic's effects on the population and directing the appropriate public health response," the CDC states. "Death certificates provide crucial data on causes of death and are used to document deaths resulting from this pandemic. This can only be done with complete and accurate cause of death reporting. When COVID-19 is determined to be the cause of death, it is important that it be reported on the death certificate, otherwise proper tracking of the pandemic is not possible. If COVID-19 is determined to be a cause of death, it should be reported on the death certificate."

According to the CDC, an individual's immediate cause of death should be listed in Part 1 on line A of a death certificate, followed by any relevant intermediate causes on line B and any underlying causes on line C, with any other contributing conditions listed under Part 2 of the death certificate.

McCrackin's immediate cause of death was listed as respiratory failure on line A with the intermediate cause of cardiac arrest on line B and the underlying cause of bilateral pneumonia on line C. No other contributing conditions were listed.

The Daily News contacted Michigan Department of Health & Human Services Public Information Officer Lynn Sutfin to ask if COVID is required to be listed on a person's death certificate in Michigan if COVID was believed to be the cause of or a factor in a person's death.

Sutfin agreed with CDC requirements that it is important for death certificates to list COVID as a cause or a factor of death. She said for the evaluation of death certificates, Michigan follows National Council

of State and Territorial Epidemiologists definitions, including cases that have a confirmed diagnostic laboratory test where the medical examiner or doctor has indicated that COVID has caused or significantly contributed to death, or the patient has died of natural causes within 30 days of onset of COVID symptoms.

Sutfin said to be considered a COVID death, a person's death certificate should list COVID disease or SARS-COV-2 as a cause of death or a significant condition contributing to death.

"Deaths are reported by health care providers, medical examiners/coroners, and recorded by local health departments in order to be counted in the daily counts as a COVID-19 death on the (state) website," Sutfin said. "The causes of death listed on the death certificate represent the clinical judgment of the physician completing the death certificate and the causal sequence resulting in death. All of the causes of death that a physician lists on a death certificate are coded to ICD10, and one is selected as the 'underlying cause of death,' according to uniform coding procedures by the National Center for Health Statistics that take into account causal sequences of disease. This is the same in all states across the U.S. to ensure uniformity in mortality statistics. All other causes are identified as 'contributing causes.'"

"Even if the death certificate only lists COVID-19, we don't count it without a confirmatory laboratory test," she added. "However, physicians may be certifying deaths without knowledge of the testing and may not know of the confirmed infection."

Michigan classifies confirmed and probable COVID-related deaths of individuals who meet one or more of the following conditions, according to Sutfin:

- Have been identified as a confirmed case and classified as deceased by a local health department as a result of a case investigation in the Michigan Disease Surveillance System (MDSS).

- Have been identified as a confirmed case in MDSS and have a death certificate with COVID-19 listed as a cause of death.

- Have been identified as a confirmed case in MDSS and die within 30 days of onset of COVID-19 infection and have a death certificate that classifies their manner of death as natural.

MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham told the Daily News that while the health department doesn't have anything to do with death certificate coding, it has everything to do with contact tracing.

"We work with people who have COVID to figure out who they had contact with, to warn those people they may be contagious and get them to quarantine," Cheatham said. "This individual (McCrackin) was confirmed to have COVID so we traced her contacts, some of whom have now tested positive themselves. This was one of the first events in the chain of cases at Carson-Crystal schools. Carson-Crystal has been great to work with and has done everything they can to stop the spread of COVID."

"I think this unfortunate death makes it more real for everyone," Cheatham added. "We also know that there have many COVID deaths. So if one death certificate is not coded correctly we are not going to get worked up about that. Our message is still that people should do everything they can to prevent the spread of this disease."

RIVERDALE

Seville Twp. officials get EGLE water test results

By Greg Nelson

gnelson@medianewsgroup.com

Seville Township officials and members of a citizens committee formed to help resolve septic tank issues in Riverdale received some good news recently.

Water samples taken at several sites throughout the community on Sept. 14 by a team from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy have all been tested with results showing positive signs of declining E.coli levels in the Pine River and local storm sewers.

"We tested great," Seville Township Supervisor Tish Mallory said. "The magic number is 300 to be

below for E.coli to be within the legal limit. All of the sites tested came back below that."

EGLE took three samples at each of six locations along the Pine River from the north side of Riverdale just east of Williams Road south to the bridge on Lumberjack Road near Elm Hall.

The average of the test results for E.coli ranged from a low of 180 to a high of 275.

However, the samples taken at some sites varied greatly.

At one spot near Fifth Street tests results at the same location ranged from 210 to 330 with an average of 275.

Another off River Street ranged from 180 to 310

TEST » PAGE 2



Water resource specialists from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, from left, Molly Rippke, Barney Boyer and District Supervisor Cheri Meyer, gathered water samples from the Pine River at several spots near Riverdale on Sept. 14.

GREG NELSON — THE MORNING SUN

Test

FROM PAGE 1

with an average of 250 for the three samples taken.

“That’s why they take the average,” Mallory explained.

She also noted that the higher levels of E.coli can be caused by animal waste running into the river.

“It doesn’t mean it’s from humans,” Mallory said.

Four storm sewer locations were also checked with tests results coming back at 1 at three spots and 10 and the other.

The numbers will likely change as the seasons do, she added.

“That’s why we really need testing done every 30 days to get the median,” Mallory said.

EAGLE got involved in the situation a couple of years ago when it was discovered several septic systems were discharging waste directly into the river.

The agency conducted tests in February and October of 2018 but township officials weren’t notified of the problem until they received a letter from EGLE in December of that same year.

“Why didn’t they let us know earlier?” Mallory asked. “We could have started working on it. We had to wait until May of 2019.”

That’s when the citizens committee was formed and the township began working with the Michigan Rural Water Association to identify the problem areas.

“Since then we’ve gotten everything fixed,” Mallory

said.

However, EGLE has ordered the township to come up with a permanent solution.

The agency, along with Mid-Michigan District Health Department, would like to see a municipal wastewater treatment facility built in Riverdale.

But township officials and residents have balked at that idea due to the hefty \$6 to \$8 million price tag.

“They still want us to create a time of transfer ordinance but Gratiot County doesn’t even have one,” Mallory explained. “That would put us in an awkward position. It doesn’t make sense.”

She noted that Isabella County, which is part of the Central Michigan District Health Department, has a “time of transfer rule” that is part of the san-

itary code and states that properties with onsite wells or sewage treatment systems must have them evaluated when the property is sold or transferred to a new owner.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Gratiot, Montcalm and Clinton counties, has considered implementing its own septic system ordinance during the past few years but has received considerable blowback from residents.

Mallory noted that EGLE has jurisdiction over the Pine River and the health department oversees wells and septic systems.

“We just want to know what’s going on,” Mallory said. “We have nothing to hide. We’ve fixed (the septic issues) and the numbers show that.”

No school updates on virus cases

Officials say they're not a significant public risk

Megan Banta and Craig Lyons

Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Seven schools in or near Lansing have reported COVID-19 outbreaks so far, but the general public shouldn't expect to hear about the cases from their local health departments.

Greater Lansing health officials say they won't automatically do mass notifications when cases of COVID-19 or outbreaks occur in local schools, a step they say isn't necessary because those exposures to the virus don't pose a significant risk to the public at large.

Schools will have to start posting COVID-19 data on Monday, per an executive order signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at the end of September.

Emails obtained by the State Jour-

“It's not something that the general public can really do anything about ...”

Anne Barna

Planning and health promotion director for the Barry-Eaton District Health Department

nal through Freedom of Information Act requests show various health departments sought to avoid “hysteria” and disruptions by not releasing information on COVID-19 cases in Greater Lansing schools to the general public.

Those kinds of notifications are only necessary when there's a public health reason, Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail said.

Anne Barna, planning and health promotion director for the Barry-Eaton District Health Department, said a mass, public notification is needed when contact tracing cannot easily identify close contacts or when a mass exposure could have happened.

With schools, contact tracers are usually able to quickly identify close contacts as there are fewer students and teachers in the buildings, Barna said. The general public is not typically at a school, unless they have a reason

See NOTIFICATIONS, Page 5A

Notifications

Continued from Page 1A

to be there, she said.

For most people, if a student goes to a school with COVID-19 and exposes five other people, it's important for school officials and the school community to know, Barna said.

"It's not something that the general public can really do anything about in terms of protecting themselves," Barna said.

No larger risk, no reason for public notification

If a situation in a school is under control and there's no risk to the public, the health department isn't going to notify the public, said Mark Cheatham, health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which serves Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. The same applies to any business or workplace, he said.

If a food handler at a restaurant tests positive for the virus but had no contact with the public, is home quarantining and the facility is properly cleaned, there's no risk to the public and no reason to notify people.

"It's the same things with the schools," Cheatham said.

If COVID-19 cases cropped up tied to a school-based activity where an unknown number of people were exposed, that would trigger a public notification, Cheatham said. That notification would go out so the general public could take action.

That's the reason Ingham County did a public notification for Riverfront Animal Hospital earlier this year, Vail said.

The hospital wasn't able to provide information to aid contact tracing, she said, so a warning to the general public was necessary.

Schools, though, have security and sign-in procedures and know who's going in and out, Vail said. That means contact tracing along with other safety protocols mitigates risk.

"Public health will do the work we need to do and notify the people directly who may truly be at risk," Vail said.

The same standard of public notification only when there's a reason to do so holds for any other communicable diseases, Barna said. If norovirus is report-

ed at a restaurant, the public will be notified because people could be at risk, she said.

"We as local public health departments, we do take really seriously our role in informing the public when there is an elevated threat," Barna said.

People stand a risk of being exposed to COVID-19 in any place, not just a school, Barna said.

Where school COVID-19 outbreaks are reported

Currently, the only source of COVID-19 cases in schools comes from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

The agency began posting those figures three weeks ago after Bridge Michigan and many other news outlets, including the Lansing State Journal, wrote to Whitmer asking for more transparency.

Vail shared reservations about that data being public stressing that health departments encourage schools to work with them when communicating not just about COVID-19 but also about other communicable diseases.

Each situation has to be dissected and evaluated to determine relative risk, she said, then a letter gets written accordingly.

"It's an individualized thing," she said.

Some situations could prove problematic when reporting individual cases, Vail said.

For example, she said, if a tiny school reports one case and parents start asking their children who was out sick, "they quickly start guessing and figuring it out," and there's no guarantee they'll be right.

People who look at the state data should keep in mind that health officials evaluate the situation and determine contacts and people who might be at risk, Vail said.

"There's no reason for people to try to start guessing about that," she said.

Keeping that in mind, people can check on outbreaks, defined as two or more cases tied to a specific place, weekly on the state's site.

Here's how the area stands with school-related outbreaks, as of Sept. 28:

- Alma Luce Road, a pre-school and elementary in Gratiot County: 31 cases, both students and staff

- St. Martha's School in Ingham

- County: 8 cases, both students and staff
- Thornapple Kellogg Middle School in Barry County: 4 cases, both students and staff

- Alma College in Gratiot County: 12 students

- Michigan State University: 1,295 students

- Olivet College in Eaton County: 2 students

- Carson City Elementary in Montcalm County: 6 cases, both students and staff. The Daily-News, a Greenville-based newspaper, reported a teacher from the district had died.

For the most part, those outbreaks only reflect incidents where the virus' spread is in a school Cheatham said. A school could have multiple people test positive for COVID-19 but if they had no shared contacts or anything that tied them together, it is not listed as an outbreak, he said.

Cases only show up if the transmission is known to have happened in a school, Cheatham said.

There's at least one exception to that — the spread of cases linked to Michigan State University, which has not resumed in-person classes, began off campus.

Avoiding 'hysteria' around COVID-19 in schools

Email chains from August show health officials discussing a Bridge Michigan article about data on school outbreaks and COVID-19 cases in schools.

Barna, of the Barry-Eaton District Health Department, shared the article with other health departments, including someone with Ingham County, Ionia County and Mid-Michigan District Health Department, to find some consensus around how to respond to requests about COVID-19 in schools.

The LSJ received those emails through a series of requests under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

Health departments have advised schools to send notification to parents when there's a case — "it's only going to take a minute before one of those parents forwards it to the news media," Barna wrote.

"I'm just not interested in feeding into the hysteria on either side of school reopening. But at the same time, the state releasing information on nursing home cases helped increase transpar-

ency and trust," Barna wrote.

Berrien County Health Department spokeswoman Gillian Conrad, in a response to Barna's email, said she will confirm cases to the media if a parent forwards an email from a school district.

"That gives a good 'in' for talking through all the ongoing, collaborative work that LHDs have with the schools, the safety protocols in place, the importance of notification/identification of those exposed ... and reiterating how families can continue practicing good preventive actions," Conrad wrote.

"I'm really feeling anxious that the media could really mess up all our best laid plans for returning to in-person learning if they hype this up and get people too scared based on a few new positive cases in the coming weeks," Conrad wrote.

Conrad worried schools would "pull the plug" before contact tracing and safety protocols could work to mitigate risk of additional exposure to the virus.

None of the emails provided by Ingham County or Ionia County include someone from either county's health department chiming into the conversation.

Balancing privacy, public's need to know

Getting information about the prevalence of COVID-19 is important, Cheatham said. People need to see the virus' spread is still not under control in some areas.

"We need the public to take it seriously," Cheatham said.

If notifications about cases start going out where the public is not at risk, that information could compromise the privacy of an individual or business.

"It's a tough balancing act," Cheatham said. "They do need to know whether it's serious or not."

During the pandemic, it has been important to share COVID-19 data with the public, Barna said. That's done to show people that actions must be taken to slow the spread or contain outbreaks.

It's clear that there are a lot of outbreaks in schools and they are happening because the public is not being safe, Cheatham said.

"We need to stop it," Cheatham said.

Contact reporter Craig Lyons at 517-377-1047 or calyons@lsj.com. Contact reporter Megan Banta at mbanta@lsj.com.

MID-MICHIGAN

Uncertainty lingers after Supreme Court decision

Local health departments, government adopt a wait-and-see approach after Gov. Whitmer's emergency orders rescinded

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
Multimedia journalist

Local health departments have adopted a wait-and-see approach, while local governments are researching their available options, following the release of a Supreme Court opinion that Gov. Gretchen Whitmer exceeded her authority

in extending a state of emergency.

"At this point, our understanding is that the Governor's Executive Orders are in effect for 21 days from the Supreme Court Ruling, although we know that she has requested clarification of this timeframe," Central Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Steve Hall said in a prepared statement. "The Gov-

ernor has also stated that many of her orders may be re-issued under other authorities. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) also has several Epidemic Orders in place which are not affected by the ruling.

"There are also multiple guidance plans and documents in

APPROACH » PAGE 2



The Central Michigan District Health Department's main office at 2012 E. Preston St.

COURTESY PHOTO

Approach

FROM PAGE 1

place that serve to continue to guide us including the Return to School Roadmap and the MISafeStart Plan, as well as the comprehensive reopening plans developed by multiple sectors of business. MDHHS has advised that they are working on their next steps which will take a little time. We believe the best scenario is to assess what future rules or orders may be issued statewide before we determine if any local orders will be necessary."

Following the release of Friday's ruling, which was prepared as a response to a federal lawsuit concerning a lawsuit brought against Whitmer over medical procedures, health departments in Ingham and Oakland counties moved quickly to issue orders keeping mask mandates in place. Macomb County's executive, Mark Hackel, announced that Macomb's health department would not.

Two sections of the 1978 Public Health Code appear to provide for emergency orders during times of epidemic. The first empowers the director of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The second, 333.2453, directly empowers local health officers: "(1) If a local health officer determines that control of an epidemic is necessary to protect the public health, the local health officer may issue an emergency order to prohibit the gathering of people for any purpose and may establish procedures to be followed by persons, including a local governmental entity, during the epidemic to insure continuation of essential public health services and enforcement of health laws. Emergency procedures shall not be limited to this code."

Whitmer has said that the court ruling doesn't take effect for 21 days, which was disputed over the weekend by legislative Republicans, who oppose a statewide mask mandate.

"From a public health perspective, the safety precautions that are in place and all of the work that we have done together have helped us to mitigate the virus's impact in the central Michigan region," Hall's statement read. "The reasons to continue masking, limiting gathering sizes, social distancing and screening of employees stretch far beyond Executive Orders."

Local governments are looking into what options are available to them.

Darcy Orlik, spokeswoman for the city of Mt. Pleasant, said they are, "waiting for additional guidance regarding the matter."

Union Township is taking the same approach, said Township Manager Mark Stuhl-dreher.

A message was sent seeking comment to Mid-Michigan District Health Department. Leslie Kinnee, MMDHD spokeswoman, said she'd need to get back in touch, but hadn't by press time.

Vail: COVID-19 authority is 'very clear'

County health boss says ruling doesn't apply

Craig Lyons

Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Ingham County's top health official says her authority to maintain safety precautions against the spread of COVID-19 is "very clear," but that power is already being scrutinized.

Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail said her power to issue the orders falls under the state's public health code and is unaffected by the Michigan Supreme Court's ruling that invalidated Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's executive orders.

"It's a completely different law," Vail said. "The authority in the public health code is very clear."

The public health code gives state and local health officials broad powers to protect public health, especially during times of a large-scale epidemic, Vail said.

Oakland County on Saturday issued an order requiring people to wear masks.

Vail on Sunday issued four local orders mandating people to continue to wear masks, limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings, keeping indoor restaurant and bar seating limited to 50% capacity and requiring employee health screenings. The orders only affect Ingham County.

"We have the responsibility to stop the transmission of diseases," Vail said, adding the spread of COVID-19 is not

currently under control in Ingham County.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services late Monday afternoon issued an order restricting indoor and outdoor gatherings, requiring masks and maintaining capacity limitations on restaurants and bars.

David Kallman, a Lansing attorney who represented Owosso barber Karl Manke during his battles with state officials because he refused to close his barbership, said public health orders enacted in Ingham and Oakland counties go too far beyond the scope of the law and aren't constitutionally sound. State law grants health officers authority to prohibit gatherings, he said, but has no provisions that allow other mandates, including wearing masks and health screenings.

"Once again, it's just like the governor's orders going too far," Kallman said. "They're doing the same things with these orders."

Vail's orders came after the Michigan Supreme Court declared a 1945 emergency powers law unconstitutional Friday. The court's opinion puts Whitmer's executive orders issued during the COVID-19 pandemic in limbo.

Does the law allow broad authority or limited action?

Vail said the local health officers can prohibit gatherings, create procedures for people to follow during an epidemic and take steps to mitigate the spread of a disease. The orders are aimed at stemming the spread of the virus, she said.

These steps are necessary to main-

tain health services and the health department has too many cases currently to keep up, Vail said.

"That is part of the way we maintain essential services to keep case counts down," Vail said.

Another key piece of the health code is that "emergency procedures should not be limited to this code," Vail said.

Kallman said that interpretation is too broad.

A health officer can limit gatherings and have procedures to ensure the delivery of essential services, Kallman said. That does not mean requiring masks or health screenings for workers, he said.

"They're going way beyond what the statute authorizes," Kallman said.

Kallman says people should take precautions against the spread of the virus and want the pandemic to end. However, the law shouldn't be used to enact orders that go beyond what's allowed during an epidemic.

"That doesn't give them carte blanche to just make something up," Kallman said.

Others considering local orders outside Ingham County

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department said Monday it is still weighing its options before instituting any local order similar to the ones in Ingham or Oakland counties.

"BEDHD is considering the efficacy of issuing orders within our district using authority granted through the Michigan Public Health Code to protect the public's health," the health department said

"We have the responsibility to stop the transmission of diseases."

Linda Vail
Ingham County health officer

in press release. "One of the challenges of addressing the pandemic through county-level actions is clarity and consistency for residents, organizations, and businesses, particularly for those which operate across multiple counties."

Like Ingham County, Barry and Eaton counties continue to see an increase in new COVID cases. The health department reported the seven-day rolling average of cases in Eaton county is 75.4 per million, a more than 200% increase over the average of new cases in September.

"Clearly, these increases are concerning and provide yet another reason for the Barry and Eaton County communities to stay the course to curtail this spread," BEDHD's Health Officer Colette Scrimger said in a statement. "We cannot risk losing control of viral transmission at this critical time, and have only a few basic tools to manage this risk."

Leslie Kinnee, a spokesperson for the Mid-Michigan Health Department that includes Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, did not respond to a request for comment.

Contact reporter Craig Lyons at 517-377-1047 or calyons@lsj.com.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Four deaths reported across mid-Michigan

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

Three people were announced Tuesday to have died from COVID-19, one each in Isabella, Gratiot and Clare counties. The three account for 14 percent of the 22 deaths reported across the state.

It is the first day since the pandemic started that someone's death was announced in each of the three counties.

Gratiot County had gone for more than two months without a death from COVID-19. That ended Tuesday.

A woman in her 80s died of the disease, becoming the county's 16th death, said Leslie Kinnee, spokeswoman for Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

Gratiot has more deaths than any other county in mid-Michigan, but hadn't recorded one since July 20. Most of the county's deaths came from two nursing home outbreaks early in the pandemic. The county's case fatality rate of 5.8 percent is slightly higher than the state's 5.3 percent.

Seven people died during an outbreak at Masonic Pathways' Jack F. Saunders Healthcare Cen-

UPDATE » PAGE 2

Update

FROM PAGE 1

ter, and another four died at Riverside Healthcare Center in St. Louis. Both outbreaks accounted for 58 cumulative cases between residents and staff. All of the deaths were among residents.

The elderly woman whose death was announced Tuesday did not live at a long-term care facility, Kinnee said.

Gratiot has 272 cumulative confirmed cases of the disease, an increase of 13 from Monday's total of 259.

Another death was also reported in Isabella County, the 15th person to die there.

Five people died in Isabella County in September, tied for the month with the most COVID-related deaths. None were associated with the biggest driver of case numbers, the CMU return-to-campus outbreak. Isabella County has a 2.2 percent case fatality rate.

The county recorded an-

other 12 cases Tuesday, increasing its cumulative total of confirmed cases from 665 to 677.

Clare County's death was its fifth since March.

Three more cases were announced Tuesday, increasing the county's cumulative totals from 111 to 114. Clare County's case fatality rate is 4.3 percent.

Another death was reported in Midland County, its 12th. Eight more cases were reported, bringing its cumulative total from 555 to 563.

Three more cases were reported in Mecosta County, increasing its cumulative total from 234 to 237, with three deaths. Gladwin County was revised down by one to 103, with two deaths. Montcalm County has 343 cumulative cases, with seven deaths.

Statewide, another 903 cases were reported for a cumulative total of 129,826, with 6,838 deaths. Of the 22 reported Tuesday, seven were identified during a search of death records.

Health Department Issues Emergency Order; COVID Deaths Reported in Gratiot, Adjacent Counties



Posted on Wednesday, October 7th, 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 [News](#) Editor

Despite last week's Michigan Supreme [Court](#) ruling that Governor Gretchen Whitmer lacks the authority to declare or extend states of emergencies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, key parts of her executive orders remain in effect under different statutes.

The Michigan Department of [Health](#) and Human Services (MDHHS) issued an emergency order on Monday reinstating many of the COVID safety requirements that would have expired with the governor's executive orders. The MDHHS's authority to issue such an order is given under the Public Health Code, and is "not tied to the emergency orders that were overruled by the Michigan Supreme Court," according to a Tuesday press release from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD).

Among the COVID-19 safety protocols included in the MDHHS emergency order are limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings as well as a mask mandate. Face coverings are required to be worn in enclosed public spaces, just as they were last week.

In addition, businesses should still follow their COVID-19 safety plans as well as all CDC, MDHHS and MIOSHA guidances, according to the MMDHD press release. County governments should continue to use their COVID-19 safety plans, and remote meetings remain [legal](#). And schools should continue to follow their Return to Learn plans and COVID-19 safety protocols.

"The Mid-Michigan District Health Department wants to be sure that the public understands that basic public health work will continue unchanged," said Marcus Cheatham, health officer for the MMDHD. "All basic public health operations including contact tracing, quarantines and food and water sanitation are still required by law and must go on."

COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Mid Michigan this week, with Gratiot and most of its surrounding counties reporting new coronavirus deaths.

Gratiot gained 19 new COVID-19 cases over the past week, and is reporting one new death. The MMDHD's Kinnee told The Herald that this individual was a woman in her 80s.

According to information from the State of Michigan, no new cases have been identified in connection with the outbreak at Luce Road Elementary School in Alma this week. The total number of cases associated with that outbreak is still 31.

And at Alma College, one new case was identified over the past week, bringing their total up to 22; however, the college is reporting that all of these individuals have recovered.

As of Tuesday, Gratiot County is reporting a total of 272 cases and 16 deaths.

One death was reported in Montcalm County this week as well. A man in his 80s passed away from the virus, according to Kinnee. The county also gained 32 new positive cases over the week, and is now reporting a total of 343 COVID-19 cases and seven deaths.

Clinton is the only one of Gratiot's neighboring counties that did not see a resident die from COVID-19 this week. Clinton gained 42 new cases for a total of 651, and is still reporting 14 deaths.

In Isabella County, 44 new cases and one new death was reported this week, bring their total case count to 677 and their death toll to 15. A death was reported in Midland County as well, where 46 new cases were identified. Midland is reporting a total of 563 COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths. And Saginaw County gained 126 new cases and three deaths, for a total of 2,910 cases and 139 deaths.

As of Tuesday, the state of Michigan was reporting a cumulative total of 129,826 COVID-19 cases and 6,838 deaths.

CORONAVIRUS IN MID-MICHIGAN

Three schools report new cases

Shepherd, Breckenridge and Mt. Pleasant among districts to disclose confirmed, probable infections

By Eric Baerren

ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com
@ebearren on Twitter

Three local school districts have reported additional cases of COVID-19. Two of them involve elementary schools.

A fifth-grade teacher for Shep-

herd Schools has tested positive for COVID-19, Interim Superintendent Greg McMillan informed district parents Tuesday night.

"I apologize for interrupting your family time, but we have had a significant change in our district's COVID-19 status," McMillan said in an email. "We have had our first,

on campus, confirmed COVID-19 case. One of our fifth grade teachers has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus."

Shepherd School District has two elementary schools, Shepherd Elementary School and Winn Elementary School. While the subject line of the email identified Shepherd Elementary School, the body copy just says a fifth-grade teacher.

The district reported it to Central Michigan District Health Department, which McMillan said be-

gan the process of contact tracing to identify who might have been exposed. Anyone determined to be a close contact will be quarantined at home. Any students who are quarantined at home will move to virtual learning.

CMDHD has traditionally defined people as close contacts who've spent 15 minutes or more within six feet of someone infected. Anyone who develops symptoms and isn't tested is classified as a probably positive case.

The case is the first confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a public school district in Isabella County.

Shortly after the Shepherd announcement, Breckenridge Community Schools announced on social media a confirmed case involving Breckenridge Elementary School. The district didn't identify the grade, or whether it involved a student or staff member.

The notice did say that all close

VIRUS » PAGE 3

Virus

FROM PAGE 1

contacts have been identified by Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

It is the second Gratiot County elementary school with at least one confirmed case of COVID-19.

Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center, part of the Alma School District, had an outbreak that involved 31 confirmed cases involving both students and staff last month.

No additional cases were reported there in Monday's school outbreak update from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, suggesting that the outbreak has been contained.

Gratiot County's cumulative confirmed cases increased by two Wednesday to 274, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The county has had 40 probably positive cases — people who had close contact with a COVID-positive person and developed symptoms — and 16 deaths. Isabella County has had a cumulative total of 93 probable cases since March.

Also on Tuesday, Mt. Pleasant Public Schools Superintendent Jennifer Verleger announced that a second probable case involving at the district's middle

school.

The first probable case, a student who developed symptoms last Thursday, prompted all teachers in one of its teaching teams into quarantine until Oct. 15, returning to class on Oct. 19. That timetable was not changed by the second case.

There are also hundreds of cases associated with Central Michigan University.

Isabella County's cases increased by 16 to 693, according to the MDHHS website. With a population of 70,000, once the county's cumulative total number of cases reaches 700, 1 percent of the county's population will have had a confirmed case of COVID-19. Fifteen people have died from COVID-19.

Cases in Clare County increased by 10 Wednesday to a cumulative total of 115, with five deaths. Five more cases were reported in Montcalm County for a cumulative total of 348, with seven deaths. Eight more cases were reported in Mecosta County, for a cumulative total of 245, with three deaths. Eleven more cases were reported in Midland County, for a cumulative total of 574, with 12 deaths.

Gladwin County, with 103 cases and two deaths, remained unchanged.

Statewide, another 1,016 cases were announced for a cumulative total of 130,842, with nine new deaths.

St. Johns High moves to remote learning after staffer tests positive for COVID-19

Ken Palmer

Lansing State Journal

USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

ST. JOHNS – Officials are moving St. Johns High School classes online after a staff member tested positive for COVID-19.

The positive test led to several other staffers and some students being quarantined for two weeks, St. Johns schools Superintendent Mark Palmer said in letter to parents on Thursday.

“As a result, we do not have enough staff members to provide the support and guidance needed for our students for in-person learning,” Palmer wrote.

Palmer did not say how many students and staff members have been quarantined or whether the staff member who tested positive is a teacher.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is trying to identify everyone who might have been exposed to the virus so they can be quarantined.

“Our schools will continue to implement thorough cleaning procedures to protect our staff and students,” the message said.

Only high school students are moving to remote learning, he said. In-person instruction will resume Oct. 20.

Contact Ken Palmer at (517) 377-1032 or kpalmer@lsj.com.

CORONAVIRUS IN MID-MICHIGAN

Contact tracing stirs emotions

Critical communication and public health strategy entices different levels of responses

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

The scenario: You get a call from an unidentified local number and when you answer, the person on the other end of the line tells you that you've had close con-

tact with someone who's tested positive for COVID-19. They ask you who you might have spent 15 minutes in close contact to.

It's part of a process called contact tracing. Someone tests positive for the disease and a public health nurse investigates, asking them who they've been in close

contact with.

Then, the nurse contacts those people to let them know to quarantine for two weeks and asks if they've developed symptoms.

Some people share their information. Others respond differently.

Last month, Marcus Cheatum, health officer for Mid-Michigan District Health Department, told Gratiot County Chairman George Bailey that one of his nurses mak-

ing these calls received so much abuse from the public that she asked to get shifted to other duties.

Angry responses are not uncommon, said Jonathan Warsh, chief of staff for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. He said he can understand it.

The nurses making the call is sharing sensitive, difficult information, he said. Due to privacy

concerns, they also can't answer the biggest question people have ... who infected them?

"People are upset about that," he said, later in the conversation adding, "These are stressful jobs, making stressful calls."

When it comes to school outbreaks, it's even more difficult, Cheatum said. School outbreaks involve disease, but they also create disruptions for everyone in-

TRACING » PAGE 3

Tracing

FROM PAGE 1

volved.

The children need to learn and it's hard for a lot of parents to juggle caring for a potentially sick child with the need to work, he said. And, the school needs to remain open to fulfill its function.

"That's just awful for the community," he said.

Cheatum said he's engaged in outreach with officials in a variety of government functions — from elected officials to education leaders — and asked

them to express support for their work. The public health department is part of government, there to support other units of government and to try to protect the public.

"We're doing what we need to be doing," he said. He said the response has been positive. It can also help health departments contain outbreaks.

When students returned to Central Michigan University in mid-August, some of them brought COVID-19 with them. Transmission at off-campus parties caused cases to explode in numbers. Students weren't as forthcoming as

they might have been with information.

"CMU students have been great recently," said Steve Hall, CMDHD health officer. "There were some bumps in the road initially, however CMU has been a great partner with us. If we have any issues, we are able to work with their Student Affairs office to get them taken care of."

CMDHD issued an order further limiting gatherings. The number of new cases started to rapidly decline, and as health departments servicing Michigan State University and Grand Valley State University took more drastic ac-

tion, the back-to-campus outbreak had slowed dramatically.

While there is some animosity everywhere, it is especially high in communities with broken trust with government, Warsh said. These aren't just politically conservative areas, but also communities that have experienced years of poor treatment at the hands of government.

It's hard to quantify how much more difficult an uncooperative public is in contact tracing efforts, Warsh said. Still, he said, it's the "only way to stop the chains of transmission."

COVID-19 hospitalizations low in Greater Lansing despite surge

Craig Lyons Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

The number of COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the Lansing area remains low as the state is seeing a surge in people admitted with the virus.

The state saw a 33% increase in hospitalizations from Oct. 6 to Oct. 13, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported Tuesday. The state reported 899 hospitalizations because of COVID-19 this week, compared to 678 on Oct. 6.

Despite the increasing hospitalization rate statewide, Greater Lansing health departments are reporting only a small number of patients in the hospital because of the virus.

Here's where hospitalizations stand, as of Thursday:

- Seven Ingham County residents are currently hospitalized.
- Seven Eaton County residents have been hospitalized so far this month. The health department said it couldn't pull week-to-week figures.
- The Mid-Michigan District Health Department said it did not have the current number of hospitalizations for Clinton County available Thursday.

Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, MDHHS chief medical executive and chief deputy for health, said basic measures like wearing masks, maintaining a physical distance from others and washing hands have worked and aided in dropping the number of cases after a spring surge.

"Yet as the colder months and flu season have arrived, we now see a concerning jump in our cases – a trend we can reverse if we all take this seriously and follow best practices to slow the spread of COVID-19," Khaldun said in a statement Tuesday.

Lansing's two hospital systems saw an increase in COVID-19 patients. McLaren Health Care, which includes its Lansing facility, reported a 19% increase and Sparrow Health Systems reported a 40% increase.

Michigan hospital systems report their number of COVID-19 patients though it does not break the numbers down by individual facility.

McLaren reported 111 confirmed positive COVID-19 patients, with 25 people in the ICU on Oct. 13. Last week, the hospital system had 93 COVID-19 patients, with 27 in the ICU.

Sparrow Health System reported 35 confirmed positive patients, with

five people in the ICU on Oct. 13. Last week, the hospital system reported 25 COVID-19 patients, with five in the ICU.

The Eaton Rapids Medical Center said it did not have any COVID-19 patients.

'Trends are on the way up'

In Ingham County, the number of hospitalizations has increased since the end of September and is at the highest levels since April, according to the Ingham County Health Department.

Last week, the health department had nine people hospitalized with three in the ICU. The prior week, four Ingham County residents were hospitalized and none were in the ICU. The ICHD only tracks data on Ingham County residents.

"Hospitalization trends are on the way up," Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail said Tuesday. She said hospitalizations tend to follow increases in positive COVID-19 cases.

The county's percent positive rate is still hovering around 5%, Vail said. Ideally, that number should be less than 3%.

Ingham County has logged 4,048 positive COVID-19 cases since March and 57 people have died. Statewide, more than 139,000 people have tested positive for the virus and 6,491 have died as of Wednesday.

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department tracked 55 people hospitalized since the beginning of the pandemic in its two-county area.

Eaton County has reported 790 positive cases of COVID-19 and 10 people have died since March.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, reported Clinton County has recorded 735 positive cases and 14 deaths since March.

As cases continue to increase, health officials are reminding people to continue taking preventative steps to protect against the virus' spread.

"As we see cases on the rise again and more hospital beds with patients than we have in weeks, we must remember what mask wearing and social distancing does: it prevents cases, it prevents hospitalizations, and it prevents deaths," said Brian Peters, chief executive officer of the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, in a statement.

Daily News

Sunday, October 17, 2020

Lakeview schools staff member tests positive for COVID-19

By [Karen Bota](#) | on October 17, 2020

LAKEVIEW — Lakeview Community Schools has its first case of COVID-19 after a staff member tested positive, according to a letter sent to students' parents and guardians Wednesday by Superintendent Kelly Nielsen.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is investigating the situation and working with the school district to identify those who had close contact with the individual, Nielsen wrote in the letter. There has been no student exposure, she added.

Lakeview is following Emergency Order MCL 333.2253 for reporting confirmed and probable cases in schools, Nielsen told the Daily News.

When the district learned of a confirmed COVID case, Nielsen and her staff began to work in conjunction with the health department to identify possible close contacts, none of which were students, she said.

“School districts have many employees. Most work directly with students, but some do not,” she said.

Nielsen declined to say where the employee works for confidentiality reasons and “for the respect of the individual’s privacy.”

Lakeview is continuing to follow the health and safety protocols that are part of the district’s COVID Preparedness and Return Plan, according to Nielsen. School staff will continue to clean and disinfect per the protocol, as well as deep clean the affected areas where the exposure occurred.

Marcus Cheatham, health officer with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, said schools have detailed plans for how to handle potential exposures, which they wrote with advice from the Medical Director, Jennifer Morse.

“The plans call for them to provide detailed information to our nurses during the investigation and these determinations (about possible exposure) are made together with them,” Cheatham said. “I do not have any reason to doubt that safe procedures were followed at Lakeview.”

The health department covers 17 school districts, and there are hundreds of cases of potential exposure to COVID-19 every week, according to Cheatham.

“These are handled by highly skilled communicable disease nurses,” he said.

Daily News

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

Greenville varsity football game Friday canceled due to COVID-19 exposure

‘Time will tell’ regarding in Oct. 30 playoff game

By [Cory Smith](#) | on October 19, 2020

GREENVILLE — Greenville High School’s upcoming varsity football game Friday evening against Grand Rapids Christian has been canceled due to a “COVID-19 exposure.”



Greenville assistant coach Mitch Oliver holds up a play sheet while seniors Cody Krause (11) and Grant Thwaites (8) look on during a practice held earlier this season. — DN file photo

According to Greenville Public Schools (GPS) Athletic Director Brian Zdanowski, the cancellation announced Monday morning was made out of “an abundance of caution” and is a direct result of a coronavirus exposure “within the varsity football program” at Greenville High School.

Zdanowski said information on the status of future games will be released at a later date.

Greenville (0-5) was scheduled to play Grand Rapids Christian (2-3) at home at 7 p.m. from Legacy Field in Greenville for its final game of the coronavirus-shortened regular season.

GPS Superintendent Linda Van Houten said in a statement Monday that the cancellation comes as the school district learned of several new, but unrelated positive coronavirus cases within the school district, with one that specifically resulted in the cancellation of the football game.

Citing privacy concerns, Van Houten could not divulge further into whether it was a student, football staff member or other personnel who tested positive.

“We believe it is in the best interest of our team to ensure they stay safe and follow all recommended guidelines for quarantining,” she said. “These continue to be very difficult times and we are navigating them one day at a time. The health and safety of students and staff will always be our priority and we will continue to keep (the public) informed as we move through the school year.”

Per the Michigan High School Athletic Association, due to the shortened season, all high school varsity football programs are eligible to make the playoffs this year.

The playoffs are scheduled to begin next week on Oct. 30, but Van Houten said “time will tell” regarding if the team will be able to participate following the positive coronavirus case.

“We are hopeful that we can do that, but we are very cognizant of the situation,” she told the Daily News regarding the playoffs. “We are hoping everybody stays healthy. We are hopeful we can be back on that field, but only time will tell.”

On Oct. 16, Van Houten announced the school district had been informed of four additional, but unrelated coronavirus cases throughout the district.

Those cases involved a staff member and student at Greenville Middle School, a student at Greenville High School and a student at Baldwin Heights Elementary School.

“The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is investigating the situations and are working with the schools to identify the close contacts that will need to stay home in quarantine,” Van Houten said in a statement. “Each building (school) impacted will also send a general letter to all parents in that building just informing them of the case in their child’s building. Only the students that get the specific letter that identifies them as a close contact will need to quarantine.”

On Monday, the school confirmed one additional case of a staff member or student — a Greenville Middle School student — resulting in seven positive cases of the coronavirus of students or staff during the 2020-2021 school year thus far.

None of the cases have been confirmed to be related and no outbreaks of the virus have been reported by the district.

No school buildings have been closed to date and no other sports have had to cancel activities.

Van Houten said some additional positive cases outside of students and staff, of individuals who are not school staff or students but are third-party employees, have been reported, but she couldn’t specify how many at this time citing privacy concerns.

“We’re just taking an abundance of caution to ensure the safety of our kids and our community,” she said. “We’re just making these decisions in the best interest of everybody.”

Van Houten said the school has reported zero “school-associated” cases so far this year.

A school-associated case would mean an individual contracted the coronavirus as a result of being in a school building.

“All of our cases are coming from outside contacts,” Van Houten said. “That means they likely got it in the home or went to an outside event and got it from there. The good news is we don’t have a widespread amount of cases or an outbreak — we don’t have an outbreak — it’s not kids or staff spreading it to other kids or staff — every one of our cases has been an isolated situation.”

While GPS averages about 3,600 students and 400 staff each year, this year more than 700 students have opted to attend the school district on a strictly virtual basis.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the virus that causes COVID-19 is spread most commonly from person to person, through respiratory droplets made when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

It spreads easiest when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet for at least 15 minutes).

People can also get COVID-19 by having direct physical contact with someone that is infected, like touching, hugging, or kissing, as well as sharing eating or drinking utensils.

It may also be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Once infected, illness begins within 2 to 14 days.

Van Houten said she is confident that despite the uptick in cases, as long as the community continues to practice proper social distancing techniques, schools will remain open.

