

All Adults Eligible for COVID Vaccine Starting April 5



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By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

With Michigan's recent expansion of COVID-19 vaccine guidelines, all adults will have the opportunity to get their shots just after Easter — and now is the time to start making arrangements for an appointment.

Starting on Monday, April 5, all Michiganders aged 16 and older are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine.

In a video message to residents of the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD) on Tuesday, Health Officer Marcus Cheatham encouraged everyone 16 and older to sign up for their COVID-19 vaccine appointment now, even if they're not eligible quite yet.

With only two weeks to go before vaccines open to all adults, signing up now will help you get an appointment faster than waiting until after April 5 to start looking, he said.

Eligibility will no longer be a barrier to receiving a shot, but vaccination appointment availability will still be a waiting game. In a March 17 video, Cheatham said that when April 5 comes, those aged 16 and older are “going to have to learn the same thing that the folks 65 and over did: just because you're eligible doesn't mean you can get vaccinated.”

“There will be shortage of doses,” he said. “Some of the folks 65 and over had to wait eight weeks or longer before it was their turn, so you'll have to be patient.”

Cheatham encourages residents to visit the MMDHD website at www.mmdhd.org to make an appointment to be vaccinated through the health department or to find links to other locations where vaccines are available.

Noting that the amount of vaccines given through pharmacies and hospitals is double what the MMDHD has administered, Cheatham said that it's important for individuals to explore these other vaccine sites as well.

“Those places could be the easiest place for you — you just need to check them out,” he said.

Residents without internet access who need help signing up for a vaccine can call 211 for assistance, and seniors over age 60 can call the Gratiot County Commission on Aging at 989-875-5246.

Cheatham told residents that he wants everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to keep the community safe.

“This disease kills people. It's killed almost as many people as cancer — almost as many people as heart disease,” he said. “You could pass the disease on to someone you love and they could suffer terribly.”

In Gratiot County, data from the State of Michigan reveals that as of Sunday, over 10,000 residents — nearly 30 percent of the Gratiot population aged 16 and up — have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Of those individuals, about over 6,100 have had their immunizations completed, meaning they've had two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or one dose of the Johnson and Johnson.

That leaves just over 18 percent of Gratiot residents aged 16 and up fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

While the number of Gratiot residents protected against COVID will only continue to rise as more and more individuals get their shots, Cheatham cautions that now is not the time to “relax on COVID safety.”

Over 70 percent of county residents aged 16 and up have not had any doses of vaccine. And though some of the nearly 2,500 Gratiot residents confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 in the past year may still have a degree of immunity from the virus, there are still several thousand more residents who are fully capable of contracting and spreading the deadly disease.

Protocols like masking, handwashing and social distancing continue to be important tools to slow the spread and save lives.

Experts see multiple reasons COVID-19 is surging

Cases rise despite vaccination effort

Carol Thompson and Ken Palmer

Lansing State Journal

USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Michigan marked two pandemic milestones Wednesday: 30% of the population had received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and more people got sick from the virus than any other day in 2021.

Why is the coronavirus surging despite so many people getting vaccinated?

The reasons are likely three-fold, local public health and infectious disease experts said: Contagious variants are spreading, limits on gatherings have relaxed and people are letting their guards down.

There were 5,030 COVID-19 cases identified in Michigan on Friday, and 20 people died from the disease, state data show. The Michigan Health & Hospital Association recently reported an alarming trend in increased hospitalizations among young people, who are less likely to be vaccinated.

As of Friday, 2.5 million Michiganders had been vaccinated, roughly 31% of the population over 16.

That's good, but not enough to make a dent in case numbers, said Dr. Subhashis Mitra, a Michigan State University infectious disease specialist and medical professor.

"Unless you get herd immunity status, vaccination, it helps, but it doesn't really stop the spread," Mitra said.

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As of Friday, 2.5 million Michiganders had been vaccinated, roughly 31% of the population over 16.

MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Surge

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“That’s the pain. When people hear about, ‘well, we hit 100 million people vaccinated in the country,’ they think ‘oh, that’s a lot of people.’ But that still doesn’t get us to that herd immunity status.”

Mutating virus behind some outbreaks

Like similar viruses, the coronavirus mutates as it spreads. Some of those mutations cause big problems — they become variant strains that could be worse than the original.

That’s the case with the variant first detected in Great Britain, which mutated to become more contagious, Mitra said.

That variant has been identified on MSU’s campus, he said.

It’s also been identified in 43 Michigan counties, including Clinton, Eaton and Ingham, as well as the prison system, according to information provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. As of Friday, there were 1,113 confirmed cases of the variant strain and two unconfirmed cases.

“The surge, particularly in Michigan, that we’re seeing is probably more because of the variants,” Mitra said.

Health officials believe the variant first identified in Britain was behind a COVID-19 outbreak involving Grand Ledge Public Schools athletes, the Barry-Eaton District Health Department said March 12, when 47 related cases were identified.

“It may be impacting schools more than we want,” Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said.

Two more variant strains have appeared in Michigan, according to the MDHHS data.

A variant strain first identified in South Africa was detected in Jackson County earlier this month. There were four cases, one in Clinton County, two in Jackson County and one in Kent County, as of Friday.

One case of the variant first detected in California has been identified in Oakland County.

Local health officials said the newer, more transmissible variants are proba-



Medical Assistant Tiara Kemp-Watson pulls COVID-19 vaccinations from vials into syringes at a vaccination site. MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

bly a factor in the current surge, along with the state’s relaxation on indoor gatherings and a pandemic-weary public easing up on precautions.

Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail said younger people are making up a larger percentage of new cases than they did a few months ago.

Positivity and new case rates in the county are running about twice what they were a few weeks ago, and more than a third of recent cases involved people in their teens and 20s, she said.

That makes sense, considering younger people aren’t being vaccinated, she said. And it suggests that hospitalizations and deaths from the current wave might be lower because young people generally have better outcomes.

The virus is spreading through gatherings tied to athletics, although the return of more students to in-person classes doesn’t appear to be a significant driver of the surge, she said.

As of early this week, Eaton County had a positivity rate of 11.3% and a seven-day average of about 343 new cases per million. Those numbers are about three times higher than they were in mid-February but not as high as the peak in November, during the second wave, officials said.

High school athletics are playing a role in the current surge, said Anne Bar-

“The surge, particularly in Michigan, that we’re seeing is probably more because of the variants.”

Dr. Subhashis Mitra
MSU infectious disease specialist
and medical professor

na, planning and health promotion director for the Barry-Eaton District Health Department.

“We’re seeing more close contacts with younger people,” Barna said. “They are coming into contact with 20 other people. What ends up happening is that it spreads that much more... Whenever people get together, they are very good at giving each other COVID-19.”

As the rules relax, case numbers go up

Behavior plays a role in the coronavirus spread, too, Mitra said.

“I understand that a year is a long time, so people are traveling more and maybe not practicing the [safety precautions] they’ve been practicing, at least over the winter months,” he said. “So those are, I think, some of the other things. People letting their guards down, the push to reopen things.”

Mitra pointed to behavior in Miami,

where tourists on spring break crowded the streets, as an example of lax behavior.

Coronavirus restrictions on gathering sizes and business activities are relaxed in Michigan despite the increase in cases. On March 22, MDHHS allowed outdoor stadiums to open at 20% capacity, and restaurant dining remains allowed at 50% capacity.

Vail noted that no one knows exactly what causes the new coronavirus to surge as it does.

“Viruses seem to have a seasonality to them,” she said. “When they are novel, like this one, you might eventually see these waves settle into a more predictable pattern. The last one started in October and just came out of nowhere. When we get to the end of this, we’re going to figure that out.”

It’s been a year, but don’t get lazy with safety precautions

President Joseph Biden announced Thursday his goal to administer 200 million vaccine doses within his first 100 days in office.

That’s ambitious, Mitra said, and would put the country well on its way to herd immunity.

Until then, the same old precautions — wearing masks, avoiding indoor gatherings, social distancing and careful hand washing — are key to limiting spread.

“It’s very difficult, but once we get the herd immunity with the vaccine, I think things are going to be local hot spots, but in general the spread would be much, much more limited,” Mitra said. “Just double down on the same things people have been doing over the last year.”

The current surge is putting a strain on local health departments, and people should do what they can to limit the spread of the virus until enough people are vaccinated to end the pandemic, local officials said.

“I think the point people should take from this is COVID-19 hasn’t gone away,” Barna said. “You still need to do all the stuff we’ve been asking you to do since last year. Getting vaccinated as soon as you can would be the new ask we have of people.”

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Health officials urge public to not wait to register for vaccine

Craig Lyons

Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

As Michigan prepares to widen COVID-19 vaccine eligibility, health officials say now is the time to get in line.

Vaccine eligibility opens to anyone 16 and older on April 5. People 16 and older with an underlying condition or anyone older than 50 are now eligible to schedule an appointment.

“Our message right now is to sign up now no matter who you are,” said Marcus Cheatham, health officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department,

adding that by the time people find a provider and get on a list, it will be April 5, he said.

Here are tips to navigate getting a vaccination appointment:

Register early

If people want to get on a list ahead of April 5, they should pre-register, said Sarah Surna, community health promotion specialist for the Barry-Eaton District Health Department. Those who register early will likely get an appointment

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People 16 and older with an underlying condition or anyone older than 50 are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
MATTHEW DAE SMITH/
LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Vaccination

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sooner, she said.

Surna said not everyone will be able to get an appointment on April 5 or even that week because of the demand.

"It's still something that requires patience," she said.

Health departments, pharmacies and hospitals have online registration systems for people to get in the vaccination queue.

People without internet access or who need help scheduling an appointment can call Michigan's COVID-19 hotline at 888-535-6136. Michigan's 211 line can also assist people.

Keep your options open

People should look for a vaccination appointment at any available provider, Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail

said. That includes health departments, hospitals, pharmacies and even the mass vaccination site at Ford Field in Detroit.

Many people think they can only get vaccinated in the county in which they live, but that's not the case, Cheatham said. People can get an appointment where they live, where they work or even in a county where they have family, he said.

Keeping an eye on major health systems nearby is a way to find a vaccination opening, Cheatham said.

Don't worry about the cost

Vaccine providers are not charging patients for the shot because it's paid for by the federal government.

Some providers, including pharmacies and hospitals, will take insurance information and may bill for administrative costs.

People without insurance who get an

appointment at a pharmacy or hospital will not have to pay out of pocket for administrative costs. Those are covered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Finding the right shot for kids

On Monday, vaccination opened for anyone 16 years and older with underlying conditions. The catch is that 16- and 17-year-olds can only get the Pfizer vaccine. Moderna and Johnson and Johnson are approved only for people 18 and older.

When 16- and 17-year-olds are registered for a vaccine, a provider will let them schedule if the Pfizer vaccine is available there, Vail said. Providers will see the age on the registration and know if they can schedule them.

Health departments are working with providers to store and distribute the Pfizer vaccine to locations that might not

have that brand, Vail said.

Know what you're getting

Right now, Pfizer and Moderna are the most widely available vaccines, but production will soon ramp up and more of the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine will be distributed, Cheatham said. Once more Johnson and Johnson vaccine is available, widespread vaccination will happen faster, he said.

If people are looking for a particular vaccine, they should see what is available at a clinic when they register or by calling the clinic, Cheatham said. If people have religious or other objections to a type of vaccine, they should be able to find an alternative at another clinic, he said.

"The important thing is to get vaccinated," he said.

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

How many vaccines get wasted?

Good news: State reports less than 0.1% discarded

Sarah Lehr and Rachel Greco

Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Providers in Greater Lansing and across the state say they're wasting little to no doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Statewide, providers have reported tossing or losing only 0.05% of the millions of doses distributed.

The Ingham County Health Department reported wasting zero doses and the Barry-Eaton District Health Department says it has tossed only a "handful." An official with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which serves Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, said data shows 17 doses have been wasted in their area, compared to the tens of thousands administered.

The low numbers are encouraging at a time when every dose is precious and need for the vaccine continues to outstrip availability. While some waste may



Medical workers pull COVID-19 vaccinations from vials into syringes.

MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

be unavoidable, experts say it's essential to track the doses that spoil or get tossed so officials can flag problems with the vaccine process and supply chain.

"Waste is a heartbreak in the face of demand that far exceeds supply," said Debra Furr-Holden, an associate dean for public health integration at Michigan State University. "Throwing vaccine in the trash is the equivalent of throwing money in the fireplace."

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Waste

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How do vaccines go to waste?

COVID-19 doses could be wasted if a vial breaks, is lost or is not kept at the proper temperature. That could happen because of problems in transit or because of a lack of freezer space.

Federal regulators approved the vaccines with a limited shelf life and providers sometimes don't have people ready to take shots before they expire.

The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines can be stored for about six months in ultra-cold conditions. Once thawed, Moderna's can be refrigerated for roughly 30 days and Pfizer's for about five days. But providers have only about six hours to administer each type of vaccine once the seal on a vial is broken.

Michigan registry lists tiny fraction of vaccines as wasted

Providers across the state have reported only 2,290 COVID-19 vaccine doses as wasted as of Wednesday, according to Lynn Sutfin, a spokesperson for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

That's a tiny fraction — less than a tenth of a percent — compared to the 4.3 million doses distributed across Michigan by that time.

Nearly 2.5 million Michiganders, about had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine as of Wednesday.

Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require two doses whereas the Johnson & Johnson vaccine involves only one dose to be fully vaccinated. About 1.4 million Michiganders, or 17.4% of the population, have been completely vaccinated against the disease, according to an MDHHS dashboard. That dashboard, accessible to the public, does not include information about vaccine waste.

The state's goal is to vaccinate at least 70% of the population against COVID-19. That's based on an estimate of the level of the population necessary to reach herd immunity — the threshold where enough people are immune to a disease so as to make spread unlikely.

State: providers are required to report vaccine waste

Health care providers are required to

report data on the COVID-19 vaccines they're administering, including data on waste, to the Michigan Care Improvement Registry, a state database, Sutfin said.

Sutfin referenced a provider agreement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which states providers "must report the number of doses of COVID-19 Vaccine and adjuvants that were unused, spoiled, expired, or wasted as required by the relevant jurisdiction." The CDC distributes vaccines to state health departments.

State officials are "not actively reaching out" to providers to verify that all of them are reporting waste, Sutfin said.

"We are not sending regular surveys to obtain this information or conducting verification of reports," Sutfin wrote in an email. "We feel confident providers are following the requirements of the vaccine provider agreement."

17 doses wasted in Clinton, Montcalm compared to thousands administered

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department reported wasting only one dose in Clinton County because a syringe malfunctioned and leaked, local health officer Marcus Cheatham said.

The department reported zero doses wasted from Gratiot county and 16 doses wasted from Montcalm County.

In Montcalm, two of those doses were doses the health department couldn't account for at a January clinic, he said. Other waste happened because of mishaps like leaks or a bent needle. And a "small" health care provider in the county wasted nine doses after administering one dose and throwing out the rest of the vial, Cheatham said. Cheatham declined to name the provider but said the organization will soon stop administering COVID-19 vaccines for reasons unrelated to the waste.

Some providers have reported unused vaccines, Cheatham said. In those instances, health department staff have retrieved those vials and brought them back to the agency for use.

"We're practically zeroing out our stock every week," Cheatham said. "We can see that it's getting into arms."

More than 25,600 people in the Mid-Michigan Health District, 18% of the district's population, had received at least one COVID-19 shot as of Wednesday, according to state data.



A registered nurse draws a shot in Lansing. MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Barry-Eaton says it's seen 'handful' of wasted doses

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department has reported wasting only a "handful" of doses because someone dropped a syringe or didn't properly draw a dose, department spokesperson Anne Barna said.

Barna said she did not have an exact figure of the number of wasted doses because, while the Barry-Eaton District Health Department reports waste to the Michigan Care Improvement Registry, the local department does not keep its own ongoing tally.

The department has "extensive procedures" to prevent waste including an on-call list of people who've agreed to "drop everything and come to get vaccinated" on short notice, Barna said.

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department has given at least one dose of the vaccine to more than 38,000 people in the two counties it serves, according to data listed on its website.

Ingham County says it's reported zero instances of waste

The Ingham County Health Department has reported zero instances of waste to the Michigan Care Improvement Registry, Health Officer Linda Vail said.

In some cases, if thawed-out doses are left over at the end of the day, the health department will vaccinate the volunteers who help staff the county's mass vaccination clinics. The county also sends its leftovers to Lansing Urgent Care since those clinics are open late into the night. Lansing Urgent Care gives the doses to eligible people who are signed up for upcoming vaccine appointments, Vail said.

More than 73,400 Ingham County residents, about 30% of the county's population, had received at least one dose as of Wednesday and nearly 18% of Ingham has been fully vaccinated, according to the state's dashboard.

The amount of vaccine doses in a single vial varies — it can depend on the skill of the provider drawing the dose and factors like how many air bubbles get into the syringe. Pfizer vials, for instance, tend to contain between five and seven doses and the state currently expects each vial to contain six doses.

Vail said she knows of only "two or three" instances in the county where a few doses ended up tossed at the end of the day because a provider didn't have someone to receive the vaccine. But Vail said those doses didn't technically count as waste, as documented to the state's database, because they were "extra" doses drawn from a vial beyond the expected allotment.

Waste could be become more challenging as rollout expands

Sparrow, a health system administering COVID-19 shots in Greater Lansing, has wasted zero doses of the vaccine, spokesperson John Foren said. Staffers typically contact people with upcoming vaccine appointments and ask them to come in early when doses are left over, Foren said.

McLaren Greater Lansing partners with Walgreens stores in the Lansing-area to give out COVID-19 shots and no vaccines have been wasted under that partnership, according to information provided by the hospital system.

Any Michigander over 16 will be eligible for the vaccine starting April 5 under state guidelines and some health officials anticipate waste will become more challenging as roll-out expands.

Providers like hospital systems and the Ingham County Health Department run large-scale clinics, but finding enough arms for shots from an open vial could be trickier once doctor's offices start vaccinating only a handful of people at a time, Vail said.

Ingham County avoids waste because staffers count the cars pulling up to a site and make sure not to remove a vial from refrigeration until there are enough people to use it up, Vail said.

"They watch like hawks at the end of the day for every single car that comes in and they do not pull a vial from the cooler until they need one," Vail said.

Lakeview Area News

Thursday, April 1, 2021

Spectrum Health, Health Department Team Up on COVID-19 Vaccine



The new location for COVID-19 vaccination clinics at Spectrum Health United Hospital and information about Mid-Michigan District Health Department partnering with Spectrum Health on vaccine distribution.

Up to 1,000 doses a day can be given at United Lifestyles location.

**By John Norton
Communication Specialist,
Spectrum Health**

To accommodate more patients getting the COVID-19 vaccine, Spectrum Health United Hospital has moved its vaccination clinic from within the hospital to its new Lifestyles building at Marketplace Shopping Center.

The first vaccine clinic at the new location occurred Friday with 400 people receiving the vaccine.

Jon Ashford, chief operating officer for Spec-

trum Health United and Kelsey Hospitals, said Friday's clinic went very smooth.

"Our team did a great job in setting up the clinic," he said. "We have more room to serve more people and it's exciting to be able to ramp up distribution now that more people are eligible to receive the vaccine."

More than 1600 people are scheduled to be vaccinated at the new site March 29 and April 2. Mid-Michigan District Health Department is partnering with Spectrum Health in pooling its vaccine doses for additional community distribution.

(continued on page 2)

Spectrum Health, Health Department Team Up On COVID-19 Vaccine

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After evaluating vaccination data, especially that in Montcalm and Ionia Counties, health department and hospital leadership collaborated to arrange to get more doses into the community. They were able to arrange for special shipments of Pfizer vaccine to United Hospital from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

“We’re delighted to

partner with Spectrum Health and add our doses to make the most community impact,” said Marcus Cheatham, health officer for Mid-Michigan District Health Department. “We want to help get the most people vaccinated in the most efficient way possible.”

“We’re very excited to collaborate with the health department to maximize the impact of our clinics,” Ashford said.

Beginning April 5,

anyone 16 years and older in Michigan can register to receive the vaccine.

Patients can now self-schedule their vaccination appointment at spectrumhealth.org/covid19/covid-19-vaccine.

The United Lifestyles building at Marketplace Shopping Center is at 701 S. Greenville West Drive, Suite 1 in Greenville.

Daily News

Friday, April 2, 2021

Ag workers served at Belding vaccine clinic

By [Brandon Schreur](#) | on April 02, 2021

BELDING — Walking into the Belding High School gymnasium Wednesday afternoon, Olivia Lee and Adam Frost, both of whom are seniors at Ionia High School and working in the agricultural field, were overcome with a sense of relief.



Approximately 350 people, the majority of whom were agricultural workers, received the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic at Belding High School on Wednesday. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

They were there to receive the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine — a moment they'd long been waiting for after a tumultuous year.

“I guess that I'm really excited about it just to have it this year when going to college,” Lee told the Daily News. “Just being safe at college is the most important thing for me, I think. This summer, too. I'm getting it to be protected.”

“I'm really excited about it because we're in our track season,” Frost added. “If the team gets quarantined, I wouldn't have to be quarantined if I'm vaccinated. I'm excited to be able to keep running.”

Lee and Frost were two of approximately 350 people who attended the clinic, which was hosted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), the Ionia County Health Department and Kroger.

According to Ionia County Health Officer Ken Bowen, the clinic was specifically targeted at agricultural workers.

“Agricultural workers were made eligible (for the vaccine) over a month ago,” Bowen explained. “Beside the fact that food production is obviously important, there have been many large outbreaks in agricultural/food processing settings. Ionia County is no exception, so this group is an important target for us.”

As supply and demand allowed, Bowen said the clinic also opened up to other members of the Ionia County community as well.

Standing behind the front doors of the high school to check people in, MMDHD Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Hailey Brewer said she saw nothing but smiling faces.

“Everybody is very thankful and very happy,” Brewer told the Daily News. “They're here because they want to get vaccinated. We urge everyone to get the vaccine that's offered to them. This one (the Johnson & Johnson) is just one of the vaccines that we have available in the community.

“Clinic days are very happy days,” she said. “People want to be here, they want to get vaccinated. It's really fun for our staff to see and work with the community, to see all these smiling faces. Even though we're all covered in masks, people are smiling. You do all the planning behind the scenes for a day like today and now we actually get to do the fun stuff.”

Brewer said the agricultural worker clientele is an especially important group of people to be vaccinated.



Chad Shaw of the Ionia County Health Department checks in clients at the door of Wednesday’s vaccine clinic in Belding and ensures they are not currently in quarantine due to exposure or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. — Submitted photo | Mid-Michigan District Health Department

“A lot of them are starting to work produce farms and all these other things that are starting up in the summertime,” she noted. “We thought it was the perfect time to get them vaccinated and get everyone in.”

Sweta and Bijo Patel, both of whom work for Kroger Pharmacy, made a two-hour drive from Novi to be at the Belding clinic.

“We’ve been reaching out to counties and partnering with different counties to help provide these vaccine clinics,” Sweta said. “It’s easier for us to come out to these counties to provide these clinics and help target certain communities or populations to keep them immunized and take care of them.”

Bijo said Kroger is committed to lending a hand and assisting underserved populations wherever and whenever they’re able to.

“The beauty of the Johnson & Johnson is that it’s a one-time dose,” she said. “We don’t have to worry about having them come back again. It’s very important to vaccinate this group of people that may have a language barrier... We want to help some of those who are underserved or the populations that are under-reached.”

“We’re targeting this area for that very reason,” Sweta added. “There are not very many pharmacies in this area, and there’s still not very much access to these vaccines. Even though they opened up the eligibility a month ago, a lot of them are only getting to it now.”

Belding Fire Chief Tim Lubitz was also at the clinic observing patients during the 15-minute waiting period following the shot to administer first aid if needed.

“Normally, any side effects will show themselves within that time frame,” he said. “I’m just here in case something does happen.”

By 1 p.m. Wednesday, Lubitz said his presence had already come in handy.

“We did have one guy that kind of passed out a little bit, but that wasn’t too big of a deal,” Lubitz said. “I’m glad that everyone is here. It’s a good thing for the community.”



Those waiting to receive the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic at Belding High School on Wednesday wait outside the gymnasium before receiving their dose. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

Debra Klueger, a doctor of osteopathic medicine, spent the day volunteering at the clinic — this being the first time she’s done so. Along with assisting with getting people checked in, she also helped as a Spanish translator.

“I travel for my job, usually, wherever it is that I’m needed,” she said. “Today, I’m needed here volunteering.”

Bowen said the Ionia County Health Department is continuing to vaccinate as many people as they can.

“So far, it is going fairly well,” Bowen said. “We have done mostly drive-through clinics in Ionia, but as the weather improves, we intend to move to other parts of the county. All Ionia County residents 16 and up are now eligible; although, we are still waiting on the Pfizer vaccine for 16- and 17-year-olds. Those who want to be vaccinated should sign up on our website (ioniacounty.org/health/health-department). They will be called when the vaccine is available

COVID-19 Update – Vaccine Opportunities Expand, but Cases Surge

 Posted on Wednesday, April 7th, 2021 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

It's been over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic struck Michigan, and just about four months since the first healthcare workers began to be vaccinated against the disease.

Today, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, as thousands of Gratiot County residents have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. And, according to the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department (MMDHD), there is “a ton” of vaccine headed to the jurisdiction in the coming weeks. Eligibility opened up to all Michigan adults this Monday, and within the next two months, the vast majority will have had the opportunity to get their shot.

That's the good [news](#).

The bad news is that COVID cases are surging in the area.

In a video update from April 1, MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said the situation is “very serious” — Michigan's current outbreak is “the worst in the country right now.”

Several factors are contributing to this rise in cases. The state has largely “reopened,” and Cheatham said this “did not work out” — it accelerated the spread of COVID.

Another factor is “COVID fatigue,” where more people are going out without masks and not practicing social distancing.

And a third element is the presence of new, more contagious variants of COVID-19 in the MMDHD. The variant known as B.1.1.7, also referred to as the U.K. or British variant, is present and “really spreading” in Gratiot, Montcalm and Clinton counties.

As it stands today, the MMDHD region is on track to see a surge in cases rivaling the wave that struck in early winter, Cheatham said.

“We will soon match the peak of the of the worst of the outbreak back in November and December,” he said.

“This trend will continue and we will get there.”

The MMDHD is feeling the strain, as are local healthcare providers. At MidMichigan Medical Center – Gratiot in Alma, COVID-19 hospitalizations have once again been on the rise after “several weeks” of improvement in the volume of COVID cases and the severity of the illness, said Marita Hattem-Schiffman, president of MidMichigan Health – Central Region.

This situation changed “very recently.” More individuals are coming down with the disease, and the hospital is seeing patients who are very sick.

“We have a percentage of COVID positive patients in critical care and/or who have not improved with outpatient treatment, worsening to the level that requires inpatient treatment,” she said. “At this moment the numbers are similar to those we [experienced] in Spring 2020 but virtually all result from community transmission. It's very concerning.”

While cases are surging, deaths have not followed suit. The MMDHD region is currently averaging two or three COVID-19 deaths a week, while at the previous peak, they were seeing four or five deaths every day.

Cheatham said that the drop in mortality is largely because most seniors are now vaccinated, and are therefore not becoming seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.

And according to the numbers, COVID cases among senior citizens have not been increasing much, either.

Instead, “almost all the increase is concentrated in younger people” — school-aged children in particular, Cheatham said.

This recent surge in cases is also proving that younger individuals are very much at risk of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.

Cheatham said that hospitalization trends are “as bad as they've ever been” — and daily hospitalization for young adults have “exceeded the worst that they've ever been.”

As cases continue to trend upwards, Cheatham and Hattem-Schiffman encourage the public to continue to be vigilant about following COVID-19 safety precautions — even after you've received your vaccine. Best immunity is achieved two weeks after the second dose of vaccine, and health experts are still evaluating whether

or not a fully individual can transmit COVID to others.

Hattem-Schiffman said that until healthcare experts are “very confident that we are ahead of transmission,” it is important to continue masking, social distancing and handwashing. Relaxing these safety measures prematurely is leading to more positive cases and more hospitalizations, and your local healthcare workers are seeing the suffering firsthand.

“Those working in healthcare see the consequences so starkly,” she said. “We realize not everyone has this vantage point.”

While the hospital and the MMDHD are both hard at work to address the current COVID surge, they’re also working to get the community vaccinated, and good progress is being made.

Hattem-Schiffman said that MidMichigan Health – Central Region celebrated the administration of their 10,000th dose just over a week ago.

While running the vaccine clinics in addition to caring for COVID patients is a big workload, administering vaccines has been a bright spot for workers at the hospital, Hattem-Schiffman said.

“We’ve been calling our vaccination clinic ‘the happiest place on earth’ because patients and community members... are so grateful to take this first step toward returning our community to normalcy,” she said.

MidMichigan Health is just one of many places people can go to get vaccinated against COVID-19, and Gratiot County residents have been doing a good job seeking out their shots.

As of Sunday, just over 11,700 Gratiot County residents — over one-third of the eligible population — has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. And almost 8,000 residents, just under a quarter of those eligible, have completed their full round of vaccination. Gratiot County is actually exceeding the state average for vaccination: 424 doses per 1,000 residents have been administered in the county, compared to 409 doses per 1,000 residents statewide.

While progress has been good so far, it’s about to get better still: the MMDHD is expecting to receive much more of the one-dose Johnson + Johnson vaccine, which will double the speed at which they can vaccinate more residents, Cheatham said.

He said that within two months, the MMDHD expects to reach their goal of getting at least 70 percent of the eligible population vaccinated against COVID-19.

“Definitely by the end of May, everybody who wants to be vaccinated will have a chance to be vaccinated,” he said.

As of Monday, all Michigan residents above the age of 16 are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Residents aged 16 and 17 must receive the Pfizer vaccine, as that is the only option approved for use in individuals under 18.

There are numerous avenues through which residents can receive a vaccine, and opportunities are continuing to expand. MidMichigan Health, for one, is beginning to implement vaccine clinics at all of their providers and urgent cares. Previously, all vaccinations were done in Mt. Pleasant.

Individuals looking to get on their COVID-19 vaccination waiting list can call (989) 794-7600 or (800) 445-7356 on Mondays through Fridays from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Local pharmacies are also offering the vaccine, including Meijer, Walmart, Walgreens and Rite Aid. Other hospital systems in the area are holding clinics as well, as is the MMDHD.

More information on where COVID-19 vaccines are available and how to sign up for them can be found at the MMDHD website at <https://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/>.

Seniors who need help signing up for a COVID-19 vaccine can reach out to the Gratiot County Commission on Aging (989) 875-5246, and individuals who don’t have access to the internet can call 211 for help as well.

Daily News

Thursday, April 8, 2021

Salmonella risk from spring chicks

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

It can be hard to resist fluffy chicks and ducklings, but they should be handled with care, because under all that cuteness Salmonella germs may be lurking.

Salmonella is a common bacteria found in the droppings of poultry. While Salmonella usually does not make the birds sick, it can cause illness when passed to people. Salmonella can cause diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal cramps lasting four to seven days or more. Infants, seniors, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely than others to develop severe illness, so they should be extra cautious.

Chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys can carry the Salmonella germ in their droppings and on their bodies, even when they appear healthy and clean. Salmonella germs can also be found in cages, coops, and the environment where the birds live and roam. All poultry can carry Salmonella, but chicks are especially likely carriers.

Follow these recommendations to help

protect yourself and others:

- Children younger than 5 years of age, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems should never handle or touch live poultry.

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after touching poultry or anything in their environment. If handwashing is unavailable, use hand sanitizer until you can properly wash your hands.

- Supervise children when they handle poultry and make sure they properly wash their hands afterward.

- Do not snuggle or kiss the chicks.

- Do not touch your mouth or eat or drink after handling live poultry until you have a chance to wash your hands.

- If you raise poultry, make sure to remain outdoors when cleaning any equipment, like feed and water containers, and cages.

- Do not keep live poultry inside the house where people live, eat or sleep.

- Always keep poultry away from areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored. The Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm counties.

Daily News

Thursday, April 8, 2021

Local COVID-19 cases on the rise yet again

Health dept. asks public to stay vigilant just a little while longer

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on April 08, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

Cases of COVID-19 have been steadily increasing in Michigan over the past few weeks, and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department's (MMDHD) jurisdiction is certainly no exception.

As of April 5, an average of 78 new daily confirmed cases have been reported for MMDHDs three-county jurisdiction, compared to an average of 13 new confirmed daily cases reported just 30 days ago. This indicates a 500% increase in average daily cases. Per individual county in the MMDHD's jurisdiction, the percentage increase in new cases is 440% in Clinton County, 365% in Gratiot County and 659% in Montcalm County.

In response to the spike in cases in our state, the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services has reinstated a standard 14-day quarantine for close contacts of COVID-19 cases. This removes the option of a 10-day quarantine. The state health department is also reminding everyone that "testing out of quarantine" has never been an option in Michigan. This guidance will be updated at michigan.gov/containcovid.

This increase in cases will likely impact the MMDHD's contact tracing efforts. Those who test positive for COVID-19 or who are identified as a close contact may experience a delay in hearing from our communicable disease nurses.

Those who test positive should:

- Fill out the form located at mmdhd.org/covid-reporting.
- Isolate at least 10 days from the start of your symptoms. If you do not have symptoms, isolate for 10 days from the date of your positive test.
- Notify your close contacts that they may have been exposed and encourage them to quarantine for 14 days, starting with the date they were last in contact with you. Keep in mind that someone with COVID-19 can spread the virus beginning 48 hours (two days) before symptoms start or 48 hours (two days) before testing positive.
- Answer your phone, even if it is an unknown number, because it could be the MMDHD or the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services calling to complete your case investigation.

Additional information on isolation and quarantine can be found at mmdhd.org/covid-center.

The MMDHD is asking community members to continue efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19. Washing your hands frequently, staying at least six feet away from others not in your household, not attending large gatherings, and wearing a mask can make a big difference. And, if you have not already been vaccinated, be sure to visit our website, mmdhd.org, to find vaccination locations near you.

We are so close to ending this pandemic, and we ask that you stay vigilant just a little while longer.

To Zoom or Not to Zoom? For Local Governments, That Is The Question



Posted on Wednesday, April 14th, 2021 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Just like everything else in the age of COVID, civic engagement has looked different over the past year. As many local government bodies shifted to partially or fully remote meetings, board members and residents alike have been able to participate from any place that has phone service or an Internet connection.

But over a year into the pandemic, several Gratiot municipalities are opting to pull the plug on electronic meetings in favor of something resembling a pre-COVID normal, while others still are choosing “hybrid” meetings that combine physical and remote attendance. Across Gratiot County, the way residents can get involved in their local municipalities varies depending on where they live.

The Gratiot County Board of Commissioners is one of those bodies sticking with a hybrid option for the time being, although some board members “are anxious to return to in-person meetings,” said County Administrator Tracey Cordes.

The issue was brought up briefly at last week’s Board of Commissioners meeting. Cordes shared that in her communication with the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department, Health Officer Marcus Cheatham “expressed hope” that the board would continue to meet virtually, especially given the recent surge in COVID-19 cases.

Under current Michigan law and a county-wide declaration, boards and commissions in Gratiot have the option — but are not required — to meet virtually through the end of 2021. For those that choose to incorporate in-person components, however, COVID-19 safety protocols like masking and social distancing are still required. So for now, local governments have a good deal of flexibility in deciding the best and safest way for their boards to deliberate — but those options haven’t always been clear, and they’ve recently changed.

At the end of last year, the state legislature passed an amendment to the Open Meetings Act that clarified how local governing bodies could hold public meetings amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Signed into law by Governor Whitmer on Dec. 22, 2020, the amendment allowed public bodies to hold meetings remotely — without a quorum of members physically present in the meeting room — for any reason through March 31, 2021 and retroactively back to March 18, 2020.

The amendment was passed in part to settle [legal](#) questions that arose last fall, when the governor’s authority to extend her emergency orders without approval from the legislature was struck down by the Michigan Supreme Court.

That means for bodies like the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners, who held meetings during this time period without a quorum of members attending in-person, the actions taken at such remote meetings are considered legal and valid.

This particular provision expired two weeks ago, but the amendment still allows for remote meetings to continue through the end of 2021 under certain criteria: absences due to military duty, absences due to medical conditions, or the existence of a state of emergency or disaster declared by the state or a local government body.

Gratiot County is currently under such a declaration. The Board of Commissioners passed a resolution to declare a local state of emergency on March 17, 2020. They moved to rescind the original order on June 2, but chose to reinstate it at their Dec. 1 meeting, largely to ensure their continued ability to meet remotely should COVID exposure or illness necessitate it.

In their 4-1 decision this winter, the Board of Commissioners voted in favor of reinstating the county-wide state of emergency declaration, extending it through Dec. 31, 2021 and imposing it retroactively back to June 2. Chuck Murphy, who now serves as chairman of the board of commissioners, was the sole opponent of the move. Because of this county-wide state of emergency, all municipalities throughout Gratiot have the option to continue fully remote meetings through the end of the year.

Among the municipalities continuing to meet electronically is the Alma City Commission. Gratiot’s most populous city also features one of the largest local government boards in the county, with seven elected

commissioners.

Adding in the city clerk, the city manager and other necessary staff, the Alma meetings often involve 10 or more individuals before counting members of the public who would want to attend. And while the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services amended emergency order currently exempts public meetings from the 25-person limit on indoor gatherings, the city commission is unwilling to take the risk of a crowded meeting. City Manager Matt Schooley said that it would be “very difficult for the City of Alma to hold a meeting in a space that could safely distance” all the necessary personnel while also allowing the public to attend.

While the City Commission as a whole is sticking with Zoom meetings for the time being, Schooley noted that other city boards and commissions have been able to conduct in-person meetings with safe social distancing, including a planning commission meeting held at the library last Monday. And as the weather improves, there has been some discussion in City Commission meetings about potentially gathering outside for official business. Another seven-person board in Gratiot is taking a different approach. The Ithaca City Council is planning for the council members and city officials to meet in-person, but to have members of the public “enter virtually” so they don’t exceed the safe capacity limit, said Cathy Cameron, city clerk.

The County Board of Commissioner’s approach is somewhere between Alma’s and Ithaca’s. Some commissioners are present in the meeting room, while others join via Zoom. And, like Alma, the Zoom meetings are streamed live on YouTube, and the videos remain on their channel for future viewing.

Beyond the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners, the Alma City Commission and the Ithaca City Council, many local governments are switching back to a traditional meeting format, where the public can physically join the boards in the meeting rooms.

Some, like St. Louis and Washington Township, are keeping some remote options open for their residents. St. Louis resumed in-person meetings this month, but can set up a conference call upon request, and Washington Township is planning to continue to stream their meetings live on Zoom.

But several townships with smaller boards and smaller populations have returned to in-person meetings in part because they don’t tend to see so much resident participation that social distancing would be an issue. In Elba Township, for example, the board averages “about 2 visitors a month,” according to Clerk Madalin Morris.

And Emerson Township “rarely” has residents join at all, so their five-person board can easily spread out, said Clerk Jodie Reeves. Unless there is a change in state requirements, they don’t plan to return to virtual meetings. As the state of the pandemic continues to evolve, so do municipalities’ approaches to holding open public meetings. But for the time being, Gratiot residents will continue to see at least some local government activity remain online as the county sticks with YouTube and Zoom.

“We are not out of the woods yet vis a vis Covid so we continue to follow the guidance of health officials in order to maintain as safe an environment as possible,” Cordes said.

Daily News

Thursday, April 15, 2021

Health dept. pauses use of Johnson & Johnson vaccine

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

On Tuesday, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) agreed to pause administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine following several reports of adverse events. This recommendation is supported by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS).

Safety of the COVID-19 vaccine is a top priority for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). While the adverse events associated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine appear to be extremely rare, the MMDHD is following the recommendation of the FDA and CDC to pause use of the vaccine until more is known.

All MMDHD clinics using the Johnson and Johnson vaccine have been put on hold.

If the Johnson & Johnson clinics are cancelled, those with appointments will be notified in advance.

“I would like to reassure the public that MMDHD is not dependent on the Johnson & Johnson product to achieve our vaccination goals,” said Health Officer Marcus Cheatham. “If the Johnson & Johnson vaccine remains unavailable, we will continue to vaccinate using Moderna, which is not impacted by the Johnson & Johnson pause. Those wishing to get the Moderna vaccine can visit our website (mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information) to schedule an appointment.”

To date, more than 6.8 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine have been safely administered in the U.S. The recommendation to pause comes after six reported cases in the U.S. of a rare type of blood clot in individuals after receiving the Johnson &

Johnson vaccine.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices met Wednesday to further review these cases and assess their potential significance. The FDA will then review the Advisory Committee’s analysis as it continues to investigate these cases. The MMDHD will pause the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine out of an abundance of caution until the findings of the investigation have been released.

Less than one in every million Johnson & Johnson vaccine recipients have reported the rare blood clot, but those who have been vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine within the last three weeks should be aware of the issue and watch for symptoms like a severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath. If these symptoms develop, they should contact their health care provider.

Get help scheduling COVID-19 vaccination in Greater Lansing

Craig Lyons Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

If people are struggling to find a COVID-19 vaccine appointment in Greater Lansing, there's no shortage of ways to find help.

Health officials have urged residents to register at multiple providers to get an appointment at a place that's most convenient for them.

Here's resources to help schedule a vaccination appointment in Greater Lansing.

Where to find an appointment

The Ingham County Health Department is taking registrations at hd.ingham.org. When an appointment is available, people will receive a link via email or text message to schedule an appointment.

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department is scheduling appointments online for people over 18 at barryeaton-health.org/schedule-vaccine.

BEDHD adds upcoming appointments at 3 p.m. on Fridays.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Clinton, Montcalm and Gratiot counties, has scheduling information on its website at mmdhd.org.

Sparrow Health System has appointments available at its Frandor site and at Sparrow Carson and can be scheduled using the MySparrow app. More information on the vaccine is available at Sparrow.org/vaccine.

McLaren Greater Lansing is scheduling vaccination appointments through Walgreens.

Lansing Urgent Care has appointments available at its eight locations.

People can schedule online at lansingurgentcare.com/covidvaccine.

Ingham County also is vaccinating residents at the Forest Community Health Center, Birch Community Health Center and New Hope Community Health Center. All are in Lansing.

People must call the health centers to schedule an appointment:

- Forest Community Health Center at 517-887-4302
- Birch Community Health Center at 517-244-8030
- New Hope Community Health Center at 517-887-4400

Appointments are available through various local pharmacies and can be made online:

- Meijer
- Walmart
- Kroger
- CVS
- Walgreens
- Rite Aid
- HomeTown Pharmacy

Appointments for ages 16 and 17

When 16- and 17-year-olds are registered for a vaccine, a provider will let them schedule if the Pfizer vaccine is available there. Providers will see the age on the registration and know if they can be scheduled.

Health departments are working with providers to store and distribute the Pfizer vaccine to locations that might not have that brand.

The Barry-Eaton District Health Department is holding a Pfizer clinic on Monday, April 19 at the Lansing Mall. People can schedule an appointment online or call 517-541-2605 if they need special assistance or do not have internet access.

Help is available for scheduling

People without internet access or who need help scheduling an appointment can call Michigan's COVID-19 hotline at 888-535-6136. Michigan's 211 line can also assist people.

For senior citizens, the Tri-County Office on Aging is available to help set up an appointment at 517-877-1440 or 800-405-9141.

At Sparrow, if people need assistance scheduling an appointment, they can call 1-877-205-1300.

For assistance registering in Ingham County, call 517-887-4623 or email covidvaccine@ingham.org.

BEDHD is offering assistance at 517-541-2605. If no one is available, the health department asks people leave a message. MMDHD is offering assistance at 989-831-5237.

Rides to appointments available

For CATA, people can call 517-394-2282 from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday to book a ride. Call at least one day in advance. Trips are available during CATA's regular service hours.

Eatran is scheduling appointments over the phone at 517-543-4087. Rides are available from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Clinton County residents can call 989-224-8127 to schedule a ride to a vaccination clinic. Clinton Transit will schedule a vaccination ride at any time, any day and to any destination.

Clinton Transit this week expanded its service to offer rides on Saturday for vaccine appointments or any other travel needs.

Those exposed to COVID-19 still must quarantine 2 weeks

Carol Thompson Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Don't be confused: If you were exposed to COVID-19, you should quarantine for 14 days, not 10.

That's the latest message from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which sent a release Thursday clarifying the latest state quarantine guidance, which says people should quarantine for a full two weeks after they are exposed to COVID-19.

Traceforce, a contact tracing platform used by MMDHD and other local health departments, hasn't kept up with the change in guidance. Until Thursday, it had continued to recommend the former 10-day time period instead of the full 14.

"If you were identified as a close contact (of someone with COVID-19) on or after April 5, you do need to quarantine for 14 days, even if you received a letter from Traceforce stating otherwise," the MMDHD release says.

Quarantining helps prevent CO-

VID-19 from spreading. To quarantine, a person should stay home and away from others, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, which also recommends two-week quarantines.

People should quarantine if they have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 *unless* they are fully vaccinated (which means they had their final shot at least two weeks before the exposure date) or if they have been infected with COVID-19 within the last 90 days.

Don't cut it short. Having antibodies or a negative COVID-19 test result during quarantine does not shorten the quarantine, MMDHD said.

"The health department would also like to point out that the length of quarantine and release from quarantine is determined by public health, not ones' health care provider," the release states.

COVID-19 cases are exploding locally, as Michigan remains the worst state in the nation in this season of the pandemic.

Local Healthcare Experts Weigh In On Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Pause



Posted on Wednesday, April 21st, 2021 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Healthcare providers are facing an uphill battle, trying to vaccinate as many residents as possible against COVID-19 in a race to achieve herd immunity and end the pandemic.

But with the federal government temporarily pausing the use of one of the three vaccines, local healthcare experts must wait and see what effect this development will have on the speed of their vaccination efforts — and on the willingness of residents to take their shot.

Last Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended that [health](#) care providers put their use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine on hold. The decision was made in response to reports of a rare but serious type of blood clot appearing in a handful of recipients of the vaccine.

Only six cases of this blood clot have been reported out of over 6.8 million Johnson & Johnson vaccine recipients nationwide. The six cases were all in women between the ages of 18 and 48, with symptoms appearing six to 13 days following the injection.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the nation's leading infectious disease expert, has indicated that he expects the vaccine to become available again soon, with either a “warning or restriction” regarding use of the shot.

But regardless of whether or not the Johnson & Johnson vaccine does again become available, the impact of this pause on mid-Michigan's vaccination push remains to be seen.

Dr. Richard Bates, vice president of medical affairs at MidMichigan Health – Central Region, said that it is “appropriate” for the FDA and CDC to be “very cautious regarding safety of the vaccines.”

The chance of developing a blood clot following a Johnson & Johnson vaccine is less than one in a million, so this pause is a sign that federal health organizations are taking safety seriously.

“The fact that [Johnson & Johnson] was paused is a testament to the commitment to quality and safety of all of these vaccines,” he said. “Additional study and analysis of the data is prudent.”

Dr. Marcus Cheatham, health officer of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), said the health department is “obviously disappointed” in the pause, as the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine is “definitely part of [their] plan” for immunizing residents of the district's smaller towns and villages.

The pause is certainly a “blow” to the MMDHD's vaccination goals, but Cheatham wants to “reassure the public” that the other COVID-19 vaccines, the two-shot Moderna and Pfizer, are still available in the district. Still, the removal of the Johnson & Johnson shot means that vaccination progress is slower than it would otherwise be, Cheatham said. With this vaccine requiring one dose while the others require two, the Johnson & Johnson version was allowing the district to immunize people twice as quickly.

And as COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the area, slowing vaccination progress “could mean more transmission and even hospitalizations and worse.”

Cheatham said that while the MMDHD has to “trust that the CDC is managing things the best they can” in ordering the pause on Johnson & Johnson, he does worry that the [news](#) may dissuade residents from getting any COVID-19 vaccine.

“[A]ny hiccup like this makes people more worried and may make them give up on vaccination altogether,” Cheatham wrote in an email to The Herald. “So we can only hope CDC has very carefully balanced the risks and benefits in their decision.”

As of Sunday, over 5.98 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered across the state of Michigan. Just over 218,000 of those doses have been the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. In the mid-Michigan area, this one-dose shot has been available since early March at certain pharmacies, clinic events and health care providers.

MidMichigan Health has been administering the Johnson & Johnson vaccine primarily for patients being

discharged from the hospital and patients receiving homecare services, as well as for homebound individuals who are unable to travel to a vaccine clinic, Bates said.

His patients who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine “commented that they had no unusual side effects” and were grateful for the opportunity to be immunized with just one dose, he said. Homebound individuals who saw their appointments cancelled were “disappointed” at the news about Johnson & Johnson, but were “thankful for the attention to safety.”

As vaccine availability has recently expanded, there are still a large number of residents who have not been immunized and have not signed up to receive a shot. For these people, Bates said it’s “probably too soon to tell” whether this news has already led to an increase in vaccine hesitancy; however, those who were already wary of the shots “may use this pause to solidify their decision.”

The “most concerning aspect of the pause” for Bates is the rise of misinformation surrounding the Johnson & Johnson news. More people than ever are now eligible to get immunized against COVID-19, but if misinformation leads to large numbers of people to hold out from getting their shots, it could compromise the ability to reach herd immunity and end the pandemic.

“Achieving trust in the vaccines and those who are assuring their safety are key to approaching herd immunity and thus the risk of repetitive surges,” he said.

Cheatham said that the people at the MMDHD “completely understand” why residents are worried about the vaccine, but the health department is offering it because they are “convinced it is safe and effective.”

The vaccines are “immensely more safe” than contracting COVID-19, Bates said. Cheatham agrees, noting that deaths have soared in the region and the country since the pandemic began.

“This year COVID has become our third leading cause of death and the vaccine can help us put a stop to that,” Cheatham said. “We think people should chose vaccination, but we will still be here for folks whatever they decide.”

Bates encourages people to that advantage of whatever vaccine becomes available to them. And, as COVID-19 is still spreading in the area, he asks that everyone continue to wash their hands, wear masks in public and practice social distancing.

For information on where to sign up for COVID-19 vaccine appointments in and around Gratiot County, visit the MMDHD’s COVID-19 vaccine webpage at <https://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/>.