

# Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, April 29, 2021 and May 6, 2021



## COVID-19 Vaccine

APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE

*The Mid-Michigan District Health Department is offering the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost and is able to vaccinate those 18 years of age and older.*

Vaccine options for those under 18 can be found on our website at [www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/](http://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/)

Schedule an appointment in just a few minutes by visiting [www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/](http://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/)

If you need help scheduling an appointment, call **211** or the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at **989-875-3681, option 2.**



Mid-Michigan District  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

CLINTON • GRATIOT • MONTCALM

# B.1.617 COVID-19 variant found in Clinton County

**Sarah Lehr**

Lansing State Journal

USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Michigan's first known case of the B.1.617 COVID-19 variant has been identified in Clinton County, health officials said.

Scientists first detected the B.1.617 strain in India in December. Now, the variant has been identified in an adult resident of Clinton County who recently traveled to India, according to a news release Friday from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

MMDHD was first notified of the B.1.617 variant on April 21, department spokeswoman Leslie Kinnee said.

It's typical for viruses to mutate over time and preliminary research suggests the B.1.617 variant could be more contagious.

Michigan is suffering from the nation's worst COVID-19 outbreak with 3,623 new cases reported Thursday.

Just over 40% of Clinton County residents ages 16 and over are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 compared to 37% of eligible residents statewide, according to a state dashboard updated Thursday.

"Our best defense is for everyone to get vaccinated," MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said in a statement.

Visit [mmdhd.org](http://mmdhd.org) to schedule an appointment. Cheatham also urged residents to wear masks in crowded spaces, wash their hands frequently and to follow isolation guidelines and get tested if they are exposed to the virus or experience COVID-19 symptoms.

Health officials predict at least 70% of the population will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to achieve herd immunity, which is the threshold after which a disease is unlikely to spread.

Contact reporter Sarah Lehr at [slehr@lsj.com](mailto:slehr@lsj.com).

# Daily News

Saturday, May 1, 2021



## COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments Available

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Mid-Michigan District  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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# Daily News

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

## Multiple COVID-19 variants showing up around the area

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on May 03, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

Viruses are constantly changing, and this includes SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. These genetic variations occur over time and can lead to the emergence of new variants that may have different characteristics.

Several COVID-19 variants have been found in Mid-Michigan Health Department's (MMDHD) jurisdiction (Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm counties) over the course of the pandemic. This includes the following variants: B.1.1.7, B.1.351, B.1.429, P.1, and most recently, the new B.1.617 variant.

The new B.1.617 variant (India variant) has been identified in a Clinton County adult with recent travel to India. This variant was initially detected in India last December. The CDC has not yet included the India variant on its list of concerning strains, but its emergence is a reminder that COVID-19 is still a threat.

“We know that multiple variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are circulating in The United States, in Michigan, and right here in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties,” MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said. “These variants are more contagious than other strains and are able to spread more quickly within our communities, so our best defense is for everyone to get vaccinated. “

The MMDHD continues to offer several COVID-19 vaccination clinics each week. Those who have not been vaccinated are encouraged to visit our website at [www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org) to schedule an appointment.

The MMDHD is asking community members to remain vigilant and practice these strategies to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others not in your household
- Avoid attending large gatherings
- Wear a mask around others
- Avoid crowded areas or gatherings
- Ventilate indoor spaces if around others
- Seek testing if ill, exposed, or after travel
- Follow isolation or quarantine guidance if ill, exposed, or waiting on test results

**CORONAVIRUS IN MID-MICHIGAN****Breckenridge HS athletes part of two K-12 outbreaks****By Eric Baerren***ebaerren@medianewsgroup.com  
@ebaerren on Twitter*

Five students on two Breckenridge High School teams are part of three new school-related COVID-19 outbreaks reported in Gratiot County.

The two outbreaks — two students on the track team and three on the golf team — were reported this week. The other K-12 outbreak reported in Gratiot County this week involved seven students at Fulton Middle/High School.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported a total of 311 K-12 outbreaks this week, an increase over last week. Most of them involved sports teams.

Track, baseball/softball, volleyball and lacrosse teams account for the highest number of new outbreaks, according to a MDHHS data sheet.

Another 22 confirmed cases and two deaths were reported in Gratiot County on Wednesday, bringing its cumulative total to 3,068.

No information was available about the two people who died. Mid-Michigan District Health Department stopped providing information about COVID deaths shortly before Christmas 2020. A to-

tal of 110 Gratiot County residents have died from COVID-19.

They were the only deaths reported across mid-Michigan on Wednesday.

An additional 22 cases were also reported in Isabella County, bringing its cumulative total to 5,109, with 83 deaths. An additional 11 cases were reported in Clare County, bringing its cumulative total to 1,943, with 73 deaths.

Elsewhere in mid-Michigan, no new deaths were reported, with new and cumulative cases and deaths as follows:

- In Gladwin County, five new cases were reported for a cumulative total of 1,840, with 47 deaths;

- In Mecosta County, an additional 14 cases were reported for a cumulative total of 2,857, with 30 deaths;

- In Midland County, an additional 20 new cases for a cumulative total of 6,465, with 75 deaths; and,

- In Montcalm County, an additional 42 cases were reported for a cumulative total of 4,501, with 102 deaths.

Statewide, 42 new deaths were reported for a total of 17,939 and another 2,589 cases were reported for a cumulative total of 854,536.

# Daily News

Thursday, May 6, 2021



## Mid-Michigan District HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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### choose to vaccinate

#### **COVID-19 vaccination appointments available**

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*Vaccine options for those under 18 can be found on our website at [www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/](http://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/)*

If you need help scheduling an appointment, call 211 or the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at **989-831-5237**, option 2

# Daily News

## Thursday, May 6, 2021

### Local health department shortens quarantine

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

Nearly one month ago, a dramatic rise in COVID-19 cases prompted the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services to reinstate a 14-day quarantine for close contacts of those with COVID-19.

Throughout this surge, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) has exercised the highest level of caution by maintaining the gold standard of a 14-day quarantine for close contacts as it provides the lowest risk of transmission of COVID-19 to others.

A review of local data shows case rates and test positivity rates are trending downward, which is welcome news. These findings, along with the knowledge that quarantining for two weeks causes a disruption in education and a hardship for some families has led the MMDHD to reduce the number of required quarantine days.

While a 14-day quarantine period is still recommended, it may be shortened to 10 days if the person remains symptom free and continues to monitor themselves for any sign of COVID-19 illness. This change goes into ef-

fect May 5. Anyone who is in a 14-day quarantine on or after May 5 can reduce it to 10 days.

MMDHD has notified Traceforce, the contact tracing program for the State of Michigan, of the quarantine change. However, errors are expected for several days as the quarantine change is implemented in the Traceforce system. We apologize in advance if you receive a letter or message from Traceforce stating that your quarantine period is 14 days instead of 10.

As a reminder, proof of antibodies or a negative COVID-19 test result during quarantine will

not reduce or end quarantine. The only people excluded from quarantine are those who have been infected with COVID-19 within the last 90 days or are fully vaccinated for two or more weeks prior to exposure.

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 been vaccinated, be sure to visit [mmdhd.org](http://mmdhd.org), to make an appointment.

# Daily News

Friday, May 7, 2021

## Montcalm Prevention Collaborative and Montcalm Area Intermediate School District team up for youth

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

The Montcalm Prevention Collaborative (MPC) whose primary mission is to reduce youth substance use throughout Montcalm County is delighted to announce the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) has received a Federal Drug Free Communities grant on its behalf.

The grant provides \$125,000 running through Sept. 29. Additional funding of \$125,000 annually will expire in 2025. At the end of five years, the MPC and MAISD will have an opportunity to extend the grant for a subsequent five years for a total of 10 years. This amounts to approximately \$1,250,000 that will be coming back to our communities.

The purpose of the grant is to help Montcalm County volunteers implement community drug abuse prevention activities.

MPC Coordinator Jodie Faber said, "The vitality of the Montcalm Prevention Collaborative lies with the volunteers."

Chairperson Amy O'Brien added, "This is an exciting effort. Everyone involved is working to move us toward positive outcomes for youth as well as the community as a whole."

Comprised of volunteers, MPC addresses public health concerns around tobacco, marijuana, alcohol and opioids. One of the key work teams of MPC is the Youth Wellness Team, which is comprised of high school aged youth throughout Montcalm County working to impact the health and safety of their communities.

There are openings for volunteers as members of MPC in general, the Youth Wellness Team and on other work teams such as the Prescription Drug and Medication Disposal Team, Marijuana and Health Team, Tobacco Prevention Team and the Underage Drinking Prevention Team.

The members of the MPC would also like to congratulate the Ionia County Substance Abuse Initiative Coalition for receiving its Drug Free Communities grant this year, as well. Ionia and Montcalm are two of only 11 coalitions in Michigan receiving new grants this year.

"We can truly make a difference in our communities when people join together with a common cause," said John Kroneck, MPC vice chairperson

To be part of the MPC Team, contact Faber at [Coordinator@MontcalmPrevention.org](mailto:Coordinator@MontcalmPrevention.org) or call (989) 831-3659.

# Daily News

Saturday, May 8, 2021

## 5 Montcalm County schools ask parents to vaccinate children ‘to keep schools open’

Central Montcalm and Tri County schools did not sign the statement

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on May 08, 2021

A joint letter of support asking parents to have their children vaccinated against COVID-19 in order “to keep schools open” was signed Tuesday by five Montcalm County public schools and the Montcalm County Area Intermediate School District, along with several schools in Clinton and Gratiot counties, as well as the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers the three counties.



Mid-Michigan District Health Department logo

“The best way to keep our schools open is to reduce and prevent COVID-19 in our communities, especially in those people who are around our students and staff,” the letter states. “Currently, our best hope of doing that is with vaccination for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. We ask that all those able to get vaccinated for SARS-CoV-2 do so to help keep our schools open. As vaccination becomes available to younger age groups, we encourage you to get your children vaccinated to help end this pandemic and help us have a more traditional school year in the fall.”

The letter directs people to visit the local health department’s website ([www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org)) and concludes, “The kids in your community are counting on you.”

The letter was signed by Carson City-Crystal, Greenville, Lakeview, Montabella and Vestaburg schools. The letter was not signed by Central Montcalm Public School or Tri County Area Schools.

“Central Montcalm continues to follow all of the requirements from our state and local health officials,” Central Montcalm Superintendent Amy Meinhardt told the Daily News on Friday afternoon. “Our focus is on providing students with a positive learning experience.”

“We continue to focus on the education of children as we finish this school year,” Tri County Superintendent Al Cumings told the Daily News. “Tri County has continued to follow the MDHHS guidelines and worked closely with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department on local school COVID (safety). We support their work to promote the vaccine to help get all communities reopened.”

**NO IONIA COUNTY ORDER REGARDING QUARANTINE**

Ionia County Health Officer Ken Bowen told the Daily News that he and Ionia County public schools have not yet collaborated on a vaccine-related letter like Montcalm County's letter.

However, a joint press release from the public health departments in Ionia, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties was issued on Friday stating that the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services has advised them that enforcement of the state's school quarantine guidelines must now be by local health department order.

The four health departments jointly stated that they will not be issuing any countywide orders requiring school districts to comply with state quarantine guidelines.

"The local health departments have advised the school districts within their jurisdictions that in consideration of current epidemiological trends, increasing vaccination coverage rates, and the availability of safe and effective vaccines, the local health departments are not issuing county-wide orders requiring all school districts to comply with the MDHHS' quarantine guidelines. Instead, the local health departments will 1) maintain their continual assessment of vaccination and new case data; 2) consult with hospitals, infectious disease experts and educators; and 3) respond as warranted to particular school situations with individually developed guidance and, if necessary, orders."

According to the joint statement, the requirements for the wearing of face masks is embedded in the state's epidemic orders and remains an enforceable mandate at the state and local level.

"The local health departments continue to recommend that the local school districts use the (state's) quarantine guidelines as best practices for the protection of area children, teachers and staff and the prevention of outbreaks in the school setting."

# Daily News

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

## CC-C school board debates quarantine and contract tracing rules

Board considers waiving final exams this year

By [Brandon Schreur](#) | on May 12, 2021



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education Treasurer Mark Jensen, left, and Vice President Chris Ryan debate the district's procedures for COVID-19 quarantine and contact tracing during Monday's meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

CARSON CITY — Following last week's announcement from the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services stating that local health departments now must enforce quarantine and contacting tracing guidelines in

schools rather than the state, local school districts are now struggling to figure out what that looks like within their buildings.

For Carson City-Crystal Area Schools, that decision is one the district is not taking lightly.

On Monday, the CC-C Area Schools Board of Education unanimously agreed to continue with the district’s Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan for another month and to not make any drastic changes to its contact tracing and quarantine procedures at this time.

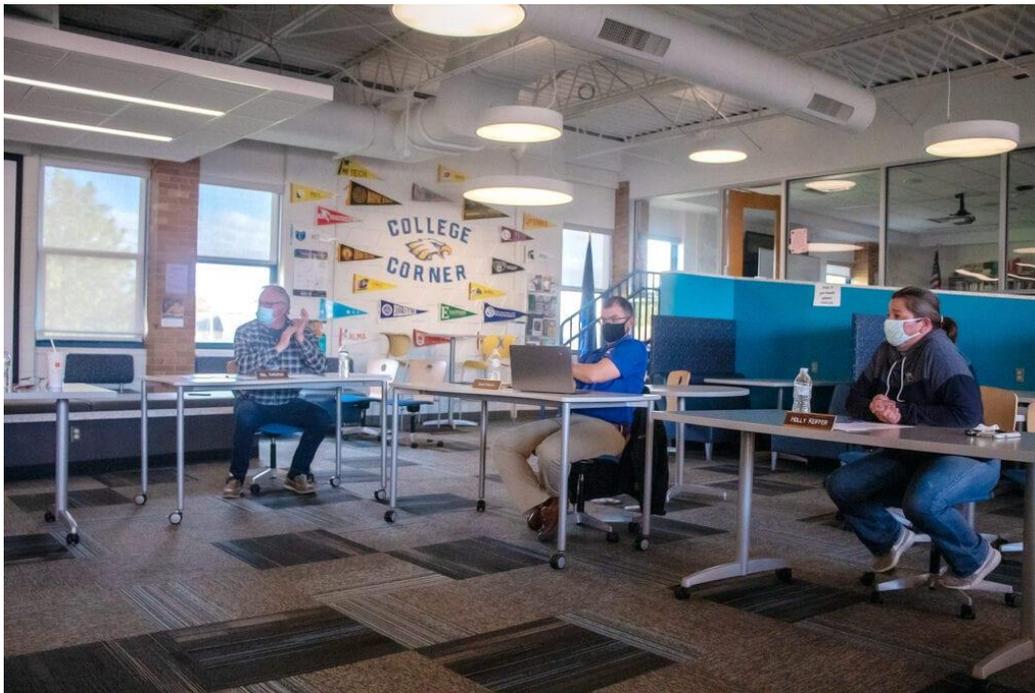
The topic was discussed at length, as board members heard input from several staff members as to whether the district should continue mandatory quarantine periods for those exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

A debate about final exams and whether the district intends to keep them this year despite all the students who have been out of school due to quarantine also came up.

### **Board discussion**

When broaching the topic, Superintendent John Sattler provided some details about the situation.

“There’s been a lot of movement on this as far as who has the authority, who doesn’t, whether it’s an order or whether it’s a recommendation over the last three or four days,” Sattler began. “That’s caused some confusion. There have been some school districts that have come up and said they will not quarantine or contact trace anymore ... This has been a big to-do over the past few days. That’s why we added this to the board agenda for discussion. Where are we? What’s best for our community? What’s best for our kiddos?”



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education Secretary Holly Keiffer, right, Trustee Scott Fleisher, center, and Trustee Neil Kapustka debate the district’s procedures for COVID-19 quarantine and contact tracing during Monday’s meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

“It’s one of those issues where I don’t know if we can all be on the same page. It’s a really, really difficult issue because of all the dynamics and things that have happened for over a year, now. All of those changes. We’ve been learning new things as we go.”

According to Sattler, a recent study in the state of Michigan showed that 1.1% of students exposed within a 6-foot radius of another student who has tested positive for COVID-19 will later test positive for COVID-19.

“That means the percentages of getting sick if you’re in that six-foot radius is very low,” Sattler said, noting that all of those exposed students still have been required to quarantine at home for a time throughout the school year.

Secretary Holly Keiffer and Trustee Stacey Springsteen said they were in favor of finishing out the school year with the plan the district has implemented since last August.

“We stuck with that all along, for eight months of the school year,” agreed Treasurer Mark Jensen. “We have a month of school left. In the plan, it says we’ll follow the (Mid-Michigan District Health Department’s) recommendations. The health department’s recommendations have not changed.”

Vice President Chris Ryan said he was focusing in on the time students have lost in the classroom due to quarantine.

“How many of our students have been quarantined three or four different times?” he wondered. “Did they ever test positive? We’re putting healthy kids on quarantine when their butt should be in the classroom, learning.”

Ryan additionally pointed to student-athletes and how they’re regularly receiving rapid COVID-19 tests weekly.

“If they’re already getting tested, then we know they’re negative,” he pointed out.

Jensen said while he didn’t necessarily disagree with Ryan’s points, that conversation was perhaps one that should happen over the summer in regards to the 2021-22 school year.

Trustee Scott Fleisher voiced some agreement to this.



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education President Gregg McAlvey listens to staff input about the district’s procedures for COVID-19 quarantine and contact tracing during Monday’s meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

“I know one student, right off the top of my head, who has been out of school on four separate (quarantine) occasions,” he said. “This is a really good student, and she’s struggling. Normally, she wouldn’t be. I just have a hard time with everybody being out of school. I really do.”

Trustee Neil Kapustka said he’s gone back-and-forth on the matter, noting that both sides bring compelling arguments to the table.

“We’ve also got to remember that we’ve had two wonderful people that passed away from this (COVID-19) in this school district,” Kapustka continued. “It’s a tough thing. It’s a tough situation.”

### **Staff input**

With several CC-C staff members sitting in the audience, Ryan posed the question as to what their thoughts were about changing the district’s procedures.

Several of those staff members — including teachers Samantha Jensen and Jill Postema, High School Secretary Lainie Niemi, Athletic Director Travis Wilcox and others — spoke on some of the struggles they’ve been dealing with recently.

“I had a student today that should have been quarantined and wasn’t,” Jensen explained. “They weren’t wearing their mask properly. I had to tell the student several times to put their mask up. I had other kids in class that didn’t want to sit by them ... In a sense, it’s not fair to those that have been quarantined. I can say my son has been quarantined four

times this year, and he needs to be in school. However, it's also not fair to the other kids that are now at school and are at potential risk."

"Emotionally, I'm sorry for these children for the two years they've had," Postema added. "Can we hold on 25 more days for these kids? And finish the year with the commitment that we make. Thank God, you guys could do prom for them (high-schoolers) and you try to make little things happen whenever you can. I just think about siblings, taking it home with them, giving it to grandparents. Thank God we've got the vaccine happening, that can help, but I just don't know how many of our quarantined kids truly never got it or were just asymptomatic."

Board President Gregg McAlvey spoke about some of the challenges students face when being quarantined.

"We do know that kids at home don't do well," he said. "We do know that they will probably never get caught up. Trust me, I'm dealing with it. We do know that suicide rates are going through the roof for high school kids — and it's related, according to studies, from kids being quarantined."

"That's why I suggested we could look at whatever we want to do for next year," Mark Jensen commented. "Let's take a thoughtful look at it over the next few months and decide."

Lower Elementary Principal Alexis Shaver was also in favor of waiting until the summer before making any drastic changes.

"I think this is an incredibly difficult decision," she said. "I know that, when we sat down as a team to write the (Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan), it took weeks. I think, if this was January, maybe this was something we'd need to discuss and figure out for this year. Right now, I can tell you that there are staff that's scared. Having made phone calls this year that were difficult, I really strongly suggest we discuss this once the school year is over."

"That's a given," McAlvey said. "We know we're going to do that."

"I just don't think we can make changes, yet," Shaver continued. "I don't think it's a bad thing to make changes, but you're going to have some teachers and staff that are more worried about making sure they're preventing COVID than being in the classroom teaching."

Sattler said one thing the district could look at doing next year is rapid-testing students exposed within a 6-foot radius of another person with COVID-19.

"Would that ease any tension for teachers, for students and for families?" he wondered. "I can't answer that. Everyone has a different level of how they feel as far as comfort goes. It's a tough one. It really is."

Board members ultimately agreed to continue with the district's pre-established Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan for the remainder of the school year in a unanimous vote and to re-visit the conversation at a later date.

## **Final exams**

The question of whether the district intends to administer exams this school year came up toward the end of Monday's meeting.

Sattler said that was a conversation he and Upper Elementary, Middle School and High School Principal Doug Hoogerland were currently having and that some sort of final announcement would come at a later date.

“If I was going to do it, it’d be a waive,” Sattler said. “Then the teacher could have maybe a quiz or fun assignment on the last day. I just don’t see how you could hold kids to that standard — have that big of a portion of your grade based on a semester exam.”

# Daily News

Thursday, May 13, 2021

## Greenville school board addresses facemasks, vaccine concerns

By [Cory Smith](#) | on May 13, 2021



Members of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education were updated Monday on COVID-19 numbers and restrictions currently affecting and implemented throughout the district, while also listening to concerns brought forward on those restrictions from members of the public. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GREENVILLE — With less than a month remaining before the final day of school, students, faculty and administration at Greenville Public Schools (GPS) are more than ready to conclude a year immersed in the coronavirus pandemic.

In finishing out the final weeks of school, however, the GPS Board of Education made it clear Monday evening it has no intention of relaxing current COVID-19 restrictions, unless such recommendations are made or restrictions are rescinded from agencies including the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MDHSS), Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) and the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA).



Greenville Public Schools Board of Education President Norice Rasmussen addresses the public, which participated in Monday’s school board meeting via Zoom, regarding concerns over COVID-19 restrictions currently in place throughout the school district. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

At the start of Monday’s meeting, Board President Norice Rasmussen read a prepared statement addressing concerns she said have come forward in recent weeks from parents and members of the community regarding restrictions throughout the school district.

“It has come to our attention that some members of the public are unhappy with the current masking, social distancing and other mitigation requirements currently in place at Greenville Public Schools,” she said. “As the Board of Education, however, we want to be clear — the Greenville Public Schools is obligated to follow the MHSAA guidelines and requirements for athletics and health department requirements for schools.”

In regards to wearing masks, while some restrictions such as having to wear a mask outdoors in crowds under 100 have been rescinded, Rasmussen pointed to the order issued by the MDHHS on April 19 and effective through May 24, which requires businesses, government offices, schools, child care organizations, operators of public transit and all other gathering organizers to not allow indoor or outdoor gatherings of any kind unless they require individuals to wear a face mask.

Additionally, beginning April 26, all face mask requirements also were applied to children ages 2 to 4.

“Under the order the district must prohibit gatherings, unless individuals wear a face mask, and deny entry to any person refusing to wear a face mask,” Rasmussen said. “The district must also encourage and maintain physical distancing among students.”

Rasmussen said the school district is “legally obligated” to comply with the MDHHS epidemic order and that refusing to do so “could amount to significant liability to the district and place students and staff in harm’s way.”

Rasmussen said the school district is not involved nor has it consulted in deliberations or decisions made by the MDHSS or the MMDHD, related to mitigation measures or protecting the public from COVID-19.

“If any member of the public is dissatisfied with the current orders or questions the rationale or reasonings that support the MDHHS or local health department orders or guidelines, he or she should contact the MDHHS or the health department directly,” Rasmussen said. “The district must rely on the expertise of public officials, including the health department, when complying with laws and orders related to public health.”

Rasmussen said the actions taken by the school district have been made in the best interest of the health of students and staff.

“Our focus has always been and will continue to be providing the safest educational environment for our students,” she said. “This year has been difficult for students, staff and parents. We appreciate support from the community as we endeavor to make the 2020-2021 school year as successful as possible.

“We understand not all members of the Greenville community will support the decisions made by the MDHHS, the local health department or the board, regarding how this pandemic was handled, but we hope the community understands and respects all decisions made by this board and by administration were made to serve the best interest of our students and public health,” she continued. “We will continue to evaluate and reevaluate the board’s handling of this pandemic and its impact on students.”

### **In-person learning resumes**

Rasmussen’s comments on behalf of the board came after students returned to school last week following a two-week “pause” April 19 to 30, in which in-person learning at both the middle school and high school was suspended and students and staff utilized remote learning from home.



Greenville Public Schools Superintendent Linda Van Houten provides an update regarding COVID-19 restrictions throughout the school district during Monday’s meeting of the Board of Education. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Superintendent Linda Van Houten said prior to the pause, both schools were experiencing a surge of quarantines and positive cases with the high school at 141 students quarantined and 20 current positive cases and the middle school at 189 quarantines and 20 positive cases — along with an outbreak of the virus identified at the middle school involving five students.

“We had a little break in our services and moved to distance learning and this was due to an increase in positive cases in the community and within the school district,” Van Houten said. “We were also advised by the MMDHD in a letter sent to us on April 21 to pause our instruction for secondary students and athletic events due to the surge in our community and our schools, along with the outbreak at our middle school.”

In the more than three weeks that have passed since the pause was implemented, Van Houten said attendance throughout the school district has risen from 82% to 89%.

“We believe that break enabled us to get back on track,” she said. “Now all buildings are back to in-person learning, with the positivity rate at the schools reduced significantly. Administration is recommending we continue with in-person learning for all grade levels along with continuing to offer the Legacy Learning virtual schooling as an option for families who are not comfortable sending their kids to in-person school.”

Van Houten said she is optimistic the school year will conclude without another break from in-person learning.

“The positivity rate in the county has been continually decreasing in the last two weeks and we believe that it is safe for our buildings to be open as most school cases are not contracted within the school buildings,” she said.

On April 16, the one-week positivity rate in Montcalm County was 21.11%. As of May 9, that average has declined to 14.91%. Van Houten said that while the break has helped, positive cases continue to come forward from students.

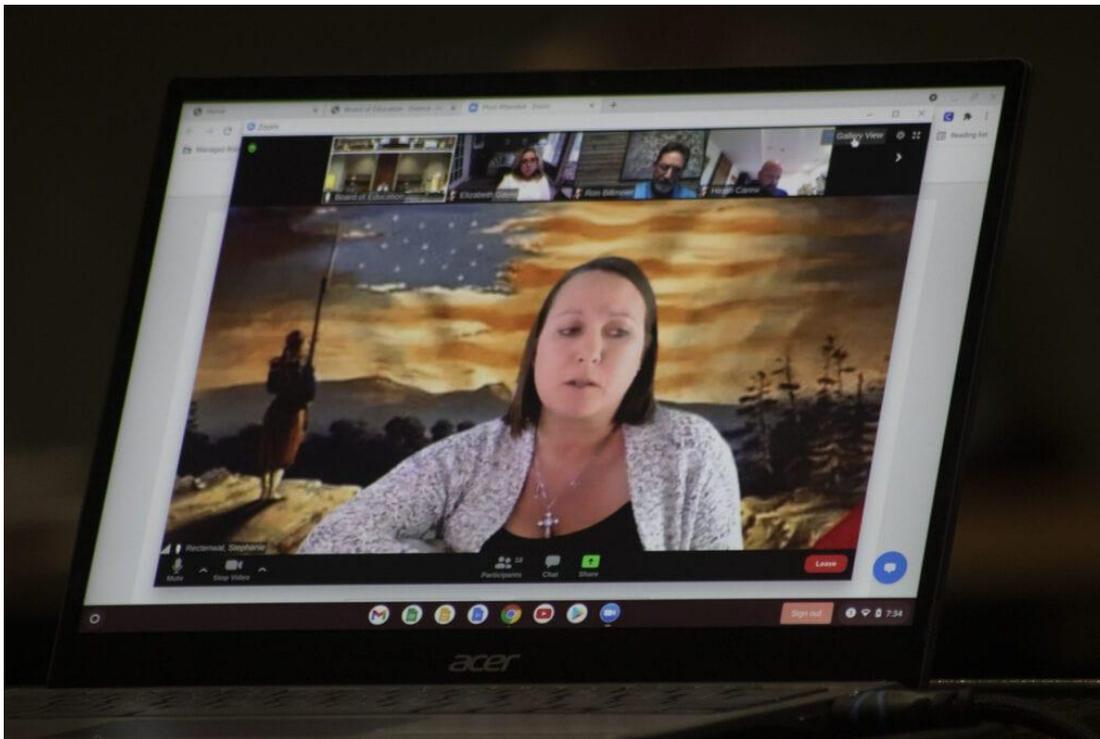
Last week, the district reported 11 positive cases (10 students, one staff member) and Monday, Van Houten said another nine had been identified.

Thus far in the school year, GPS has recorded 244 positive cases between students and staff.

“Today we did have a rise in cases — six of those were from athletic testing,” Van Houten said.

### Public comment

While Rasmussen requested that members of the public take their concerns specific to COVID-19 protocols to local and state health departments, some community members felt compelled to express their personal frustration directly to the school board during public comment.



Stephanie Rectenwal of Eureka Township addresses the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education via Zoom during Monday’s board meeting, bringing forth concerns she has with COVID-19 restrictions and encouragement from the school district for people to be vaccinated. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“I’m concerned about the 2021-2022 return to school and having to deal with the same COVID precautions we had this year,” parent Becky Allen of Eureka Township said. “I can tell you about what it has done to my children and to me as a parent and also as a working full-time mother. We think that the staff at our school has done a good job, but when it comes to people like you, that sit on the school board, and perhaps people above you, they are not adhering to parent concerns. I am here voicing those. I am against the masks.

“All the ramifications from all the changes, everything everyone has gone through ... I would just urge that you drop these masks and sectioned-off playgrounds,” she continued. “Areas where kids can only be in certain groups, not able to talk to kids in other classrooms, it all seems very military-style, which is not what some of us have in mind for our children.”

“Thank you for your comments, we appreciate it,” Rasmussen responded. “For all the comments people provide, we are going to take those into consideration.”

Parent Heath Carew of Oakfield Township raised concerns over what he alleged was a double standard regarding restrictions in schools after the Lincoln Heights PTO provided treats for teachers in the building during Teacher Appreciation week last week.

“They come back to school ... and they have treats and snacks in the hallway for all the teachers, but our students can’t have treats or snacks,” Carew said. “They can’t bring them in for birthdays, we had to bring in cards for Valentine’s Day three days in advance, but here we are with extra visitors in the school right after we came down with this shutdown. It just makes no sense. You have this mountain of sweets, eating in front of kids, with the doors open, where all the kids can see it.

“The same standard is not being set,” he continued. “I want to know, which direction is it going here? I guess you need to decide, are we going to follow these rules? It makes zero sense to me. Either everyone follows the guidelines or the guidelines are BS.”

“I understand what you are saying and we will check into it,” Rasmussen responded.

Parent Chad Albert of Oakfield Township said he took issue with no option of a waiver for students to opt out of wearing a mask.



Greenville Public Schools Board of Education Trustee Charlie Mahar addresses the public, which participated in Monday’s school board meeting via Zoom, regarding concerns over COVID-19 restrictions currently in place throughout the school district. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“With immunizations we can sign waivers, however, for some reason there’s no waiver for a mask,” he said. “Something doesn’t make sense logically. Every Thursday there are meetings between (the school district and

MMDHD) and I've asked to attend the meeting as a parent-interest to ask questions of these people that are enforcing these matters on our children, but I receive no response. The health department doesn't respond."

Parent Stephanie Rectenwal of Eureka Township took issue with a letter sent from the school district to parents last week, which she perceived as an attempt to "talk us into" vaccinating children.

The letter in question was a joint-school COVID-19 vaccination statement issued by the MMDHD and signed by Carson City-Crystal, Greenville, Lakeview, Montabella and Vestaburg schools, along with Montcalm Community College, the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District and 11 other school districts in Clinton and Gratiot counties (Central Montcalm and Tri County schools did not sign the letter).

"The best way to keep our schools open is to reduce and prevent COVID-19 in our communities, especially in those people who are around our students and staff," the letter states. "Currently, our best hope of doing that is with vaccination for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. We ask that all those able to get vaccinated for SARS-CoV-2 do so to help keep our schools open. As vaccination becomes available to younger age groups, we encourage you to get your children vaccinated to help end this pandemic and help us have a more traditional school year in the fall."

Rectenwal said she doesn't believe the school district should be advocating for the administration of vaccines.

Carew took issue with the final sentence in the letter, which concluded, "The kids in your community are counting on you," which he felt was a stance by the school district advocating for vaccinations.

Board Trustee Charlie Mahar said he wanted to make it clear the school district has no specific agenda toward promoting COVID-19 restrictions, such as mask-wearing, but is instead enforcing mandates handed down from health experts.

"As far as masks go, look, I think everybody would love to come back next year without masks — that's the goal, that's the hope," he said. "It's not ideal for teachers, administrators or kids. It's an uncomfortable thing, but right now we're following the experts, we're following the health department — it's a mandate. There's no agenda by Greenville Public Schools to push masks. It's something we're just following the experts on."

# Daily News

Friday, May 14, 2021

## Youths 12 and older can now receive COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer locally

Youth vaccine clinics offered next week in Belding, Ionia and Greenville

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on May 14, 2021

Youths as young as 12 years old in Ionia and Montcalm counties can now receive the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer.



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham holds up a phone showing how to use the Vaccine Finder ([vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)) to find a local COVID-19 vaccine location. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently authorized and recommended the two-dose Pfizer vaccine for youths, who must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian when receiving the vaccine.

The Ionia County Health Department will offer a free Pfizer vaccine clinic for youths 12 and older at the Ionia County Road Department from 4 to 7 p.m. on May 19. Visit [ioniacounty.org/health/health-department](https://ioniacounty.org/health/health-department) online to sign up, or call (616) 527-5341.

A free youth vaccine clinic will be held at Belding High School from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on May 21. No appointment needed, just show up at your convenience.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department will offer a free Pfizer vaccine clinic for youths 12 and older at Greenville High School from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on May 22. Visit [mmdhd.org/covid-19-vaccine-clinic-schedules](https://mmdhd.org/covid-19-vaccine-clinic-schedules) for more information, or call (989) 875-3681 option 2.

Spectrum Health is offering free Pfizer vaccines to youth at Spectrum Health United Lifestyles at 701 S. Greenville West Dr. in Greenville from 3:30 to 7 p.m. on May 17. Appointments can be made by calling 1-833-734-0016. For additional locations and availability, visit [spectrumhealth.org/vaccine](https://spectrumhealth.org/vaccine) online.

For adults looking to receive the Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine in any county (or for youths looking to receive the Pfizer vaccine), Mid-Michigan District Health Department Marcus Cheatham recommends using the online Vaccine Finder ([vaccines.gov](https://vaccines.gov)), which is connected to the state of Michigan's vaccine supply as well as to the federal retail pharmacy program, meaning it is updated in real time.

To find a nearby vaccine location, simply type in your zip code and the website will show you multiple options located nearby which offer the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. Some locations allow walk-ins with no appointment needed, while other locations require a phone call to make an appointment ahead of time.

“Say, ‘hey dad, take me right now, I wanna go!’ Then you won’t have to quarantine, you can go to the prom and play sports and all of that good stuff,” said Cheatham in an online video posted Thursday morning.