



**Warren C. Evans**  
Wayne County Executive

## Wayne County Department of Health, Human & Veterans Services

### **Public Health Advisory – Public, Non-Public, and Boarding Schools November 20, 2020**

Today, I, Carol Austerberry, in accordance with my duties under the Public Health Code to prevent disease, am issuing a public health advisory that makes the strong recommendation that schools in Wayne County – public, non-public, and boarding schools in our jurisdiction – should temporarily shift to a remote learning model through January 15, 2021.

At the present time, COVID-19 case rates have increased resulting in a second wave that is at a level higher than the first peak in April 2020. With the onset of fall weather, and the greater likelihood of indoor, interpersonal activity, there is another risk that hospital capacity will rapidly become overloaded if the upward trend of current COVID-19 cases continues. There is also the risk of a rise in the severity of cases and a higher death rate in the immediate future.

Earlier in the week, the Wayne County Public Health Division advised school districts that Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in-person learning can continue. The Public Health Division now is revising that guidance and recommending a temporary remote learning model. The reasons for this change are:

- The continued exponential growth of COVID-19 cases in Wayne County (4,185 new cases in the past six days)
- Wayne County's positivity rate for Nov. 20, 2020 is 15.5 percent;
- Continued community spread of the virus, especially among those younger than 25 years of age; and,
- Epidemiological models that show the spread of the disease will continue to increase for several weeks.

Based on these factors and out of an abundance of caution, the Wayne County Public Health Division is recommending that all school districts – public, non-public, and boarding schools in its jurisdiction – temporarily shift to a remote learning model for Pre-K through grade 8 and for pupils in grades 9 through 12 through January 15, 2021.

Michigan's "Return to Learn" legislation, Public Act 149 of 2020, was passed in August of this year to implement safer "pandemic learning" for the 2020/2021 school year in Michigan. It expresses the intent of the legislature that extended COVID-19 learning plans described in this subsection provide districts with maximum flexibility to adapt their educational programs for some or all pupils at some or all of the schools operated by the district to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

500 Griswold, 10th Floor South, Detroit, MI 48226 | T: 313.224.0810 | F: 313.224.6187  
[www.waynecounty.com](http://www.waynecounty.com)

Public Act 149 of 2020 states:

*(g) A requirement that the district, in consultation with a local health department, as that term is defined in section 1105 of the public health code, MCL 333.1105, and district employees, develop districtwide guidelines concerning appropriate methods for delivering pupil instruction for the 2020-2021 school year that are based on local data that are based on key metrics. However, regardless of the guidelines developed under this subdivision, a determination concerning the method for delivering pupil instruction remains with the district. As used in this subdivision, "key metrics" means, at a minimum, all of the following: (i) The trend of COVID-19 cases or positive COVID-19 tests, hospitalizations due to COVID-19, and the number of deaths resulting from COVID-19 over a 14-day period. (ii) COVID-19 cases for each day for every 1 million individuals. (iii) The percentage of positive COVID-19 tests over a 4-week period. (iv) Health care capacity strength. (v) Testing, tracing, and containment infrastructure with regard to COVID-19.*

Public Act 149 of 2020 gives the local health department a consultative role to help local schools and school districts determine how to safely educate students during the COVID-19 crisis. It also provides information regarding key metrics detailed in the legislation, which supports the reasons for these recommendations.

The key metrics have been trending upwards, which is alarming with the exception of the increased testing capacity rate, which means more tests are available. Increased testing capacity improves the ability of the public health officials to identify and contain COVID-19 cases, thus slowing the transmission of the disease in our community.

The Wayne County COVID-19 transmission risk level published today alarmingly lists all communities in Wayne County in a Level E, which is the highest level possible for the transmission of COVID-19.

For the week of November 8 - November 14, 2020, the COVID-19 metrics for the schools are:

1. Total "Confirmed" Number of COVID-19 Cases Reported in Out-Wayne-County (excluding the City of Detroit): 3,794, which is 1,191 more than the previous week.
2. 7-Day Percent Positivity Rate in Out-Wayne-County (excluding the City of Detroit): 13.2 %, which is 3.0 % more than the previous week.
3. Hospital Occupancy Rate for Inpatient Beds in Wayne County (excluding the City of Detroit): 74% which is 2% lower than the previous week.
4. Hospital Occupancy Rate for ICU Beds in Wayne County (excluding the City of Detroit): 78%, which is 1% lower than the previous week.
5. Testing Capacity Rate in Out-Wayne-County (excluding the City of Detroit): 5,517 tests per million, which is 917 more than the previous week.

On November 15, 2020, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services issued an Emergency Epidemic Order under MCL 333.2253, effective November 18, 2020, entitled "Gatherings and Face Mask Order," which includes a section pertaining to schools and extracurricular activities. Specifically, the Emergency Order states that "Gatherings at public, non-public and boarding schools for the purpose of conducting in-person instruction of pupils in Pre-K through grade 8 are permitted, subject to local health department and school district decisions on remote learning. Gatherings for the purpose of sports and extracurricular activities are prohibited."

After medical and epidemiological review of the key metrics referenced above and direct communications with school leadership, which is part of the Health Department's consultative role under Public Act 149 of 2020, I am issuing this advisory strongly recommending temporary suspension of in-person instruction of pupils for Pre-K through grade 8 and for pupils in grades 9 through 12 should be discontinued through January 15, 2021. In-person education should only then continue when a new semester, quarter, or trimester, after January 15, 2021, is scheduled to begin. This time frame covers the COVID-19 14-day incubation period from the New Year's holiday.

Due to State and Federal guidance, in-person instruction for pupils who are English Language Learners (ELL) and/or participants in special education services should be evaluated for appropriate mode of learning, with consideration given to this advisory as well as the State and Federal guidance requirements.

I am also strongly recommending temporary suspension of extra-curricular sports and related school sponsored gatherings through January 15, 2021. Research and epidemiological review indicate that activities related to sports and gatherings, such as carpooling and socializing, are often the cause of spread of COVID-19. The spread associated with extra-curricular activities also often precipitates the need for suspension of in-person education and the need for isolation and/or quarantine of confirmed cases and probable contacts.

In issuing this advisory, I carefully weighed the desire for in-person communication and the interpersonal connection provided by both education and extra-curricular activities. However, the medical and epidemiological data clearly indicates action is required as the spread of COVID-19 is resulting in an increase in cases and impacting the educational process as schools continue to transition in and out of the in-person learning model. Continuing to shift back and forth between in-person and remote learning in response to confirmed cases and/or probable contacts has been disruptive to both educational and Public Health goals and efforts to maintain a safe, productive and consistent routine.

The recommendations in this advisory begin on Wednesday, November 25, 2020 at 11:59 p.m.

Sincerely,

*Carol Austerberry*

Carol Austerberry, RS, MS, MPA  
Health Officer/Public Health Division Director