



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kent County Health Department Warns of Increase in COVID-19 Positivity Rate

Number of cases, positivity rate and hospitalizations all increasing

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (March 19, 2021) – The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) is alerting the community to the reality that COVID-19 cases, positivity rate and hospitalizations are all increasing.

Over the past week, the average number of new Kent County cases per day has increased from approximately 75 to over 100, including the 178 which were reported on March 17. The county's positivity rate has increased to 5.4 percent after two months of a four percent rate. Local hospitals are also reporting an increase in COVID-19 inpatient admissions. These increases reflect trends being observed in many other parts of Michigan and around the world.

"It is critically important for everyone to remember that the arrival of coronavirus variants and prematurely relaxed attitudes about COVID-19, put our community in grave danger of a resurgence in cases and deaths," said Kent County Health Department Administrative Health Officer, Dr. Adam London. "Our county has already lost at least 656 residents to this pandemic. We do not want to see anyone else lose their life, especially when we are so near to the end of this pandemic."

Public health and healthcare officials urge people to continue adhering to the prevention strategies which have been proven to reduce transmission:

- 1) wear facial coverings in public places,
- 2) stay home if you are not feeling well,
- 3) avoid large social gatherings, and
- 4) practice good hand washing.

The KCHD is also encouraging residents to be prepared to get vaccinated as soon as an opportunity is available. To date, 28.1 percent of Kent County's population has received at least one dose of vaccine. Approximately 70 percent of our residents aged 65 or older have received at least one dose and the number of cases in that age group has been cut in half. The approved vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have shown themselves to be safe and effective. The KCHD, Spectrum Health, Mercy Health Saint Mary's, and many other partners anticipate the volume of vaccine allocated to our area to increase dramatically between now and the end of May.

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We continue to vaccinate healthcare workers, first responders, K-12 educators, childcare providers, congregate care workers, all people aged 65 and older, people aged 50 and older with underlying health conditions, caregivers and guardians of children with special healthcare needs, and uniquely vulnerable/underserved populations of people. All people aged 50 and older will become officially eligible on March 22, but we encourage them to pre-register now.

At this time, we are also strongly encouraging other people in category 1B to pre-register. This group includes people who, by the nature of their business, work in close proximity to other people in the workplaces of food and agriculture, critical manufacturing, public transit, grocery stores, postal service, civil service, utilities, and other critical infrastructure. Appointments will generally be made according to vulnerability and phase status. Pre-registered persons in upcoming Michigan Department of Health and Human Services phases may be scheduled early depending on vaccine availability.

Links for pre-registration at various clinics can be found at <https://vaccinatewestmi.com/register/>. People are encouraged to select the single most convenient vaccine provider and follow the appropriate link for pre-registration. For those without a clinic preference, please select the West Michigan Vaccine Clinic at DeVos Place. That clinic receives the region's largest weekly allocation of vaccine and is capable of serving the most people.

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