



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Muskegon County



November 4, 2020

Dear Parents,

Mercy Health and Public Health-Muskegon County are pleased with how students and staff at your school are following safety protocols recommended by medical experts to limit the spread of COVID-19. We are also encouraged by the responsible way parents are notifying schools when symptoms or exposures occur.

According to data, what students and staff are doing is working. Data also show the community-based decisions schools are making related to remote and/or in-person learning are helping to limit the spread of COVID-19. The structured nature of our schools and the required practices staff and students follow by social distancing, wearing masks, and handwashing at school are positively impacting our community.

However, within our greater community, we see **a significant increase in COVID-19**, including in our more **rural areas**. Most often, these cases are due to social interactions when people were closer than six feet and masks were not worn. As of this writing, 58 people in our hospital in Muskegon are fighting the severe complications of COVID-19 disease. We must take safety more seriously outside of our schools.

If you have shortness of breath, chest pressure, and/or an extremely high fever, the sooner you seek treatment from your primary care physician, the better. Mercy Health has Urgent Care locations open at the Hackley Campus and on Sherman near Panera Bread. In emergencies or off-hours, the Emergency Room is always open and available.

Because of the increase in positive cases here in West Michigan, we advise schools to maintain the current instructional model they are using paired with their current safety protocols. We strongly discourage increasing the number of students inside our school buildings as this would reduce social distance and could increase the spread of COVID-19 exponentially. Those schools that require temporary shifts to remote learning due to staffing or illness should continue this practice.

Like some schools, our hospital is dealing with staff shortages due to illness and quarantine. Our businesses and other organizations are also feeling the impact of sick employees.

This is a critical time for our entire community. With the holidays coming up, we are asking everyone to **do these four things** to reduce the spread of the virus and maintain our children's education: **cover** your nose and mouth, **stay at least 6 feet away** from others, **wash your hands** frequently, and **notify your school** as soon as your child develops symptoms or an exposure occurs.

Let's all work together to keep our kids safe and our community healthy.

Gary Allore
President, Mercy Health Muskegon

Kathy Moore
Health Officer, Public Health Muskegon County