



Health Officer

608 Oakland Ave. | Elkhart, IN 46516 | 574-523-2105

elkhartcountyhealth.org

Elkhart County Health Department

Lydia Mertz, MD

Elkhart County Health Officer

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The transmission and number of people becoming infected by COVID-19 are at record high levels in Elkhart County. And we continue to see large increases every week. In addition to the exponential rise in cases, our numbers of hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19 are also rising at alarming rates. Our county hospitals planned for and are now experiencing surges, but they are reaching the limits of their ability to expand services and are having to forego some other procedures to address COVID-19 patients. Local government, business, and healthcare leaders are concerned about what will happen if this trend continues. We must take steps now to prevent additional hospitalizations and deaths before we reach a crisis.

We have been sending out information and warnings to the public as the number of cases has risen, and have been asking the public to do everything they can to slow the spread in Elkhart County. We now need to take decisive action as our numbers continue to spike. Medical experts, and public health experts agree indoor spaces where people gather are high-risk places, especially if masks are not used. Epidemiology shows that much of our increase now is stemming from smaller indoor social gatherings, such as visiting with friends and relatives, weddings, funerals, and other social environments where it is easy to let our guard down.

We have lowered our risk before, working together with distancing, masking, and hand washing measures. We can do this again. With these same actions we can lower the risk enough so we can go back to doing many of the things important to us. With more indoor activities taking place, it will take a strong commitment, and a sustained effort to slow the spread of this deadly virus. Let us use this holiday season to remember what we mean to each other, and what we mean to this community. Let's support each other, and emerge from this pandemic a stronger community, with more of our loved ones alive and healthy.

By letter of support, dated November 13, 2020, the Mayor, County Commissioner, and many city and town council members, public safety officials, school superintendents, chambers of commerce, and business leaders "urged the Elkhart County Health Department . . . to issue a new Public Health Order designed to more

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significantly mitigate the spread of the virus.” They further expressed their “support [for] the work of the Elkhart County Health Department to develop and adopt a new Public Health Order that will help protect our residents from being infected by the coronavirus while also keeping our economy open.”

With this support, I have executed Public Health Order 05-2020 to address the face covering directives issued in Elkhart County and Public Health Order 06-2020 to address the COVID-19 mitigation directives required in Elkhart County. With the support of the County Commissioners and City Mayors, these two Public Health Orders contain provisions for inspection and enforcement to ensure we achieve the level of compliance necessary to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

The Elkhart County Health Department is — both on their own and with the assistance of others — working to establish inspection and enforcement procedures. If, as a member of the public, you wish to report a concern regarding violations of Public Health Order 06-2020, you may contact the Elkhart County COVID-19 hotline at (574) 523-2106. Additionally, the Elkhart County Health Department will soon release an online form for submitting possible violations of Public Health Order 06-2020. Thank you for your effort and support as we work together.

Dr. Mertz
Elkhart County Health Officer

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