



BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

better health. stronger communities.

April 9, 2021

Dear Berrien County School Leaders,

Today, the Governor made a recommendation for high schools to move to virtual instruction and pause youth sports for two weeks based on rising cases and increasing numbers of school outbreaks in Michigan. Schools were encouraged to work with their local health departments. Based on local data, the Berrien County Health Department (BCHD) is recommending that high schools in Berrien County can maintain in-person instruction and youth sports can continue at the present time.

In Berrien County, there has been a rise in COVID-19 cases since the beginning of March moving from an average of 23 cases per day on March 5 to an average of 50 cases per day on March 29. Since March 29, cases have remained flat with 10 straight days of no appreciable increases. While there are many regions in the state with exceptionally high rates of new COVID-19 cases, Berrien County has one quarter the rate of new cases per day compared to areas currently the hardest hit in Michigan. The evidence in Berrien County does not show a need for the same level of new action at this time.

COVID-19 data trends are monitored daily by the BCHD and reviewed 1-2 times per week with school leaders. Beginning the week of April 9, with the commencement of mandatory athlete testing, there will be an additional source of data available to evaluate the role of students in community transmission levels. As always, we will balance our decisions with what our local data indicates and the known benefits of in-person instruction.

Through your decisive action to begin the school year with in-person instruction in Berrien County, our community has learned how safe schools can be for our students, particularly when multiple layers of protective measures are consistently in place. Consistent masking, maintaining student cohorts, creating as much social distance as feasible, strong hygiene measures, and excluding ill students and staff, the impact that COVID-19 has had on students, staff, and school operations has been minimal compared to other communities in Michigan. Schools are highly regulated environments and have likely protected our county from increased transmission because of the protection provided to students compared to what may have occurred in other, more informal settings often associated with virtual learning. The BCHD recommendations to maintain in-person instruction and youth sports are predicated on the continued diligent use of multiple layers of COVID-19 preventive measures.

Regards,

Nicki Britten, MPH
Health Officer

Rick Johansen, M.D., MPH
Medical Director/Pediatrician