



Barry-Eaton District Health Department

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November 11, 2020

Dear Partners and Leaders of Barry and Eaton Counties,

We are in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is spreading through our counties at unprecedented levels. In the past 10 days, there have been 12 deaths in our district associated with COVID-19, ranging in ages from 42 to 90 years old.

We are writing to you now to plead for your support. We all have been fighting back against this virus for more than eight months. We are still fighting, but the trend is now sharply in the wrong direction. We are tired. So are you. But there is so much more that can be done if we can break our respective silos and truly become the force for public health our communities need right now.

During the summer, BEDHD was managing case investigation and contact tracing efforts when we were getting 5-10 new cases per day. We are now getting upwards of 100 new cases a day, and there are no signs that it will slow down soon. Each case can take 1-2 hours to fully investigate, and two-thirds of our 55 staff are working on case investigation and contact tracing efforts. Just in the past two weeks, there have been 562 cases in Eaton County and 457 in Barry County, **a total of over a thousand cases**. At the current level of transmission, BEDHD cannot keep up as our staff and resources are maximized beyond capacity. We have announced that we are no longer able to contact all positive cases.

Hospitalizations too are rising, and healthcare institutions are once again under threat of becoming overloaded. Yet many have become lax with prevention efforts or distrustful of efforts that try to save lives. COVID-19 has been spreading at gatherings, at workplaces, at churches, and more.

In Barry County on September 1, 2020, there were 29 cases per million residents. Today, it is 504. In Eaton County on September 1, 2020, there were 31 cases per million residents. Today, it is 314. This rise is staggering.

As public health partners and leaders in Barry and Eaton counties, you have passion and drive to improve the lives of those living in the communities you serve. We are urging you to draw upon your elevated voices to protect these lives. Important action steps you can take to help us reduce the spread of COVID-19: Spread messages that protect health. Encourage mask usage and social distancing. Discourage in-person gatherings. Follow and enforce orders set forth by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and MIOSHA. We have attached some helpful messaging tools to this letter; please use them to help amplify our voice. In upcoming days, share our social media messages, and share documents and guidance with your staff.

Help set an example for others to follow. It matters now more than ever before.

We reduced the spread of COVID-19 in the early days of the pandemic – we estimate that dozens of lives were saved in our district. We can do it again with your help and the help of the community. The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have ever faced before, and it will take all of us, together, to keep our residents safe.

Sincerely,

Colette Scrimger, MSW Health Officer