

November 19th, 2020

Dear fellow Berrien County residents:

Together we represent businesses, nonprofit organizations, public health, local government, and health care organizations that collectively employ thousands of Berrien County residents.

But today, we write to you as fellow Berrien County citizens, as your friends and neighbors. We write as people who care for this community and for the health and safety of all our residents. We believe we can all work together to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the impact this pandemic is having on individuals, families, and our local businesses.

New COVID-19 cases in Berrien County are 9-fold higher than they were six weeks ago. Case counts are now doubling every 10 to 14 days demonstrating the exponential growth of how a virus spreads. Our health care system predicts exceeding surge capacity within the next two to three weeks if these trends do not reverse. The window of time for assisting our health care heroes to continue operating within their capacity is growing smaller by the day. Our health care system is struggling to keep staff members healthy, and testing and other supplies are beginning to dwindle nationwide. Staying safe will help our hospitals maintain manageable capacity during the surge.

As we head into this holiday season, we must remain committed to reducing the spread of COVID-19 however we can. Health officials encourage reconsidering plans for gathering with more than two households. COVID-19 will not take a break for the season and neither can we. We all have a shared responsibility to wear masks, maintain social distance, and sanitize hands and surfaces.

While we are masked and socially distant, we also need to continue to support our local businesses by ordering takeout meals, shopping local, and continuing to do business with local service providers. Businesses in Berrien County have implemented several innovative measures to ensure that customers and staff are well protected while maintaining daily operations. We believe in the creativity and ingenuity of our business owners to make it through tough times, in our mutual commitment to one another's health and wellbeing, and in the resilience of our residents.

Our response is more effective if we are united in our efforts to face this virus together. Our collective action can control the severity of COVID-19; with immediate action we can help save lives and keep our hospitals from being overwhelmed, allow our schools to remain open, and keep workers employed. As we continue to battle this pandemic, we ask that you join us in making short-term sacrifices for the long-term vision of a stronger, healthier community and economy here in Michigan's Great Southwest.

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