

# KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



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## Public Health Warning November 20, 2020

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Kent County currently has a community-wide positivity rate more than 15%, and our average number of new daily cases (689) has increased more than ten-fold over the past eight weeks. Public health officials cannot effectively conduct case investigation and contact tracing, services essential for protecting the public's health, in a timely way when new case numbers are this high.

Local hospitals are also reporting COVID-19 inpatient admission numbers that are severely threatening their ability to provide services essential for the public's health. Kent County's pace of daily deaths from COVID-19 (6.43) is at its highest point to date. In consideration of these factors, and the reality that the approaching holidays and colder weather will complicate matters, the COVID-19 risk level for Kent County is now considered **Highest Risk**.

Therefore, the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) is issuing this Public Health Warning to provide residents with heightened guidance to best protect themselves and others. This Public Health Warning will remain in effect until the 14-day total incidence of new cases per 100,000 of population is less than 350 (or approximately 165 new cases per day) and the seven-day average positivity rate of new tests is trending downward. People should expect that this Public Health Warning will likely continue through January 15, 2021 at the earliest. The cooperation of all residents with these recommendations will help our community prevent suffering and reach these markers as quickly as possible.

The KCHD continues to strongly urge everyone to wear a facial covering in public places, practice social distancing, and exercise good hygiene. In addition to complying with the [public health orders](#) issued by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the KCHD is now making stronger recommendations to curb community-wide transmission.

1. Any person sick with the symptoms broadly associated with COVID-19 should immediately isolate themselves from others as much as possible. Sick people should call their healthcare provider and/or make arrangements to be tested for COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the use of facial coverings in the home when a household member is sick. Under no circumstances should a sick person report to work, school, or attend any other group gathering.
2. People over the age of 65 and those with underlying health conditions need to be extra cautious and should avoid or at least minimize time in public places and gatherings. Everyone needs to take extraordinary precautions to protect the most vulnerable in our community. Please see the additional recommendations at the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>.
3. Businesses are essential for the wellbeing of the community. While indoor spaces present increased risk for coronavirus transmission, businesses strictly adhering to the guidance

located at <https://www.kentcountybacktowork.com> have demonstrated the ability to maintain lower risk environments. All businesses are expected to practice extreme care consistent with this guidance. Customers are encouraged to support local businesses but are advised to opt for pickup and delivery whenever possible. Time spent shopping or otherwise inside indoor public spaces should be minimized. All people are warned to closely follow the general precautions of facial covering use, social distancing, and good hygiene. Failure to do so will perpetuate the spread of coronavirus and cause prolonged harm to people and businesses.

4. The education of our young people is also essential for the wellbeing of the community. The information we have currently indicates that younger students are less effective transmitters of coronavirus than high school students. Additionally, these younger students are not as well equipped to be successful in a remote learning model. Therefore, elementary education may remain in-person with universal facial covering policies, daily symptom screenings of all students and staff, and six (6) feet of physical separation between seated students to the maximum extent possible (but never less than 3 feet between seated students). Middle school education may remain in-person with universal facial covering policies, daily symptom screenings of all students and staff, and by reducing the number of students in the classroom through remote instruction or hybrid to provide six (6) feet of physical separation between seated students to the maximum extent possible (but never less than three (3) feet between seated students). High schools are recommended to remain in a remote educational model through January 15, 2021. COVID-19 outbreaks and illnesses happen more frequently in the high school grades. This population may also effectively expose others to coronavirus even if not demonstrating the symptoms of illness themselves. High school programs serving special needs populations, students with cognitive disabilities, and center-based programs may continue with caution. The KCHD will make recommendations about schools and related activities after January 15, 2021 using the science and understanding that is available at that time.
5. Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to prevent children from gathering in groups during evenings, weekends, holidays, or during periods of remote education. The benefit achieved by these periods of separation will be eliminated if people continue to gather outside of the school setting.
6. Houses of worship and faith communities are also essential to the wellbeing of our community and provide tremendous support for the holistic needs of their members. We respect and are mindful of the importance of the separation of church and state; however, given the urgency of the situation, we strongly encourage all area houses of worship to discontinue large gatherings such as in-person worship services, weddings and meetings of more than five individuals. If this is not feasible, faith leaders are encouraged to exercise extreme mitigation efforts, relax in-person attendance obligations, and communicate the importance of avoiding all physical contact between people from different households. Individuals are also urged to follow all steps to protect themselves and others at all times, including proper use of face masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene.
7. Sports and recreational activities not covered by the [current MDHHS order](#) and requiring physical contact and/or regular close proximity (within six (6) feet) are high risk activities and are not recommended.

As noted earlier, the KCHD's ability to conduct case investigation and contact tracing is severely challenged by the rising number of new cases. The department will be prioritizing case investigations and cannot assure communication to all cases or contacts in a timely manner. For that reason, the department is asking for the cooperation of our residents:

- A. Any person notified of a positive test for COVID-19 should immediately isolate for a period of time not less than ten days from onset of symptoms (if applicable) or from test date. Person shall be fever-free without the help of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours and all other symptoms must be improving before leaving isolation. For more information on isolation, visit the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/isolation.html>.
- B. Any person who tests positive for COVID-19 should contact all persons they were in close proximity to from a period of time beginning 48 hours before onset of illness (if applicable) or the test collection date. Close contact includes persons within six feet of distance for at least 15 minutes cumulative over 24 hours and/or physically contacted with a hug, kiss, handshake, or other intimate contact. Those close contacts should be advised to quarantine according to instructions outlined in item C., below.
- C. Any person who has had close contact with someone who is infected with COVID-19 must quarantine for 14 days from the date of their last contact with the infected person. The quarantined person should stay home, stay away from others as much as possible, and watch for symptoms. If the person tests positive, they should follow instructions outlined in item A., above. If the person tests negative, that does not mean they may end quarantine. That is because it can take up to 14 days for the virus to incubate after contact with someone who is infected. If, after 14 days of quarantine, the individual has not tested positive and does not have symptoms associated with COVID-19, they may end quarantine and return to work. For those who are household contacts of a diagnosed case, the total quarantine period could last for approximately 24 days. For more detailed guidance about quarantine, visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>.
- D. We do not recommend that employees be required to show proof of two negative tests or present a "release from isolation or quarantine" letter from the KCHD. Both requirements would significantly and unnecessarily delay the employee's return to work. Plus, studies have shown that some individuals continue to test positive long after they contracted the virus and are no longer contagious. Employers should visit [accesskent.com/return2work](https://accesskent.com/return2work) for instructions on screening employees for return to work after quarantine or isolation.