



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Berrien County Extends Local State of Emergency, Re-Opens Facilities in Phases *Spectrum Health Lakeland Revises Visitation Guidelines*

(Berrien County, Michigan) – This morning, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners authorized the Chair, Mac Elliott to extend the local state of emergency until Friday July 10, 2020. This action continues to provide liability protection for non-county employees and volunteers that are assisting during this pandemic and it continues to provide that coordinated decisions are made. The Emergency Operations Center will continue to operate remotely to assist the Berrien County Health Department and Spectrum Health Lakeland during this time.

Berrien County Facilities Re-opening in Phases

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued Executive Order 2020-21 in March which ordered residents to remain at home or in their place of residence to the maximum extent feasible, which included limitations on workplaces across the state. Public access to Berrien County buildings ended on March 23, 2020 in response to the spread of COVID-19 throughout the United States and the region. Many county services remained available via telephone, email, fax, and through the website.

Through a series of Executive Orders since that time, the Governor has relaxed some of the restrictions on movement and workplaces; however, what remains is the requirement that businesses, operations and government agencies adhere to sound social distancing practices and additional measures. As such, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners approved the COVID-19 preparedness and response plan on June 11, 2020 and have moved to Phase 2 of the plan, the re-opening of County buildings (with the exception of buildings under the authority of an elected office, such as the Sheriff and the Courts). The date for that re-opening is Monday, June 22, 2020 except where noted.

County facilities have areas designated as “enclosed public spaces”, which at a minimum, is all areas frequented by the public and in constricted areas. Everyone in those areas (visitors and employees) must wear a face covering. In addition, individuals should practice social distancing, keeping 6’ between individuals. Visitors and employees will be subject to a health screening at the entrance of the buildings.

The Berrien County Administration Building, located at 701 Main St., St. Joseph will re-open on Monday, June 22, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. Some restrictions may continue with regard to complete building-wide access and will be explained via signage throughout the building. The Administration Building provides the following services: Veterans Affairs, County Clerk Vital Records Division, Register of Deeds, Treasurer, Drain Commissioner, Tax Equalization, Community Development, Parks & Recreation, Financial Services, Human Resources, and County Administration.

The Berrien County Animal Control facility, located at 1400 S. Euclid, Benton Harbor will re-open on Monday, June 22, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. with restrictions. Only three people from the public will be allowed inside the lobby area at a time, in order to keep the number of people in a small area limited to 10 as is stated in most recent Executive Orders. Volunteers may resume working at this facility and will be scheduled accordingly to maintain the limited number of people allowed in the building. Saturday hours will resume on Saturday, July 11, 2020.

The Public Defender's Office, located at 100 Church St., St. Joseph and at the South County Courthouse at 1205 N. Front St., Niles will continue to see clients by appointment only. To set an appointment, call (269) 982-8698.

The Berrien County Sheriff's Office Records Lobby, located at 919 Port St., St. Joseph will continue to see patrons by appointment only through July 17, 2020. Individuals will be able to make an appointment for the following services: Firearms Transactions, Sex Offender Registry, Fingerprinting, and Report Requests. Appointments will be available Monday thru Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. To schedule an appointment call (269) 983-7141, ext. 7211 or email sheriffrecords@berriencounty.org. No walk-ins will be accepted. The Berrien County Sheriff's Office in Niles will remain closed to the public through July 17, 2020 and all appointments will be handled at the St. Joseph Office.

The Michigan Supreme Court issued Administrative Order 2020-14 on May 6, 2020 which directs the re-openings of all Michigan trial courts. All Michigan courts are to re-open in a four phase approach. Berrien County Trial Court is in Phase 2 of re-opening effective June 15, 2020. For several months following the Supreme Court's direction to close courthouse facilities to the public, the Berrien County Trial Court has been continuing to conduct required hearings via video technology. Phase 2 provides for some additional in person court proceedings, however the majority of court proceedings for all divisions continue to be conducted remotely. Only those individuals with appointments with the court or another department in the building will be allowed in during Phase 2 and Phase 3. All members of the public must wear a mask and must complete a health questionnaire before being allowed to enter the building. Those who do not pass the health screening questions or refuse to wear a face covering will be denied access to the courthouse facilities and will be given information on how to conduct their business remotely. As long as local COVID-19 statistics remain in a downward trend, the Trial Court expects to move to Phase 3 operations effective July 6, 2020. Phase 3 will allow for additional in person court proceedings but will not mean a full re-opening to the general public. Only those with a scheduled hearing, those needing to file paperwork with the court, or those under subpoena or party to a case will be allowed in at that time and will go through the same process as Phase 2 as it pertains to screening. Phase 4 will be a full re-opening of the facilities only when a public health statement is issued indicating that COVID-19 is no longer a national public health crisis. To ensure that you are not sent away unnecessarily, please call or e-mail the court prior to coming to the facilities to determine if your question or proceeding can be handled in another manner. A listing of contact information for all departments housed in the courthouse facilities can be found at the Trial Court COVID-19 response page at <https://www.berriencounty.org/1669/COVID-19> along with additional information regarding the current status of court operations.

The Berrien County Health Department's offices in Benton Harbor, Niles, and Three Oaks have resumed full operations during normal business hours, however, services are offered by appointment only. Please contact (269) 926-7121 to make an appointment.

Berrien County officials encourage all residents to continue taking individual precautions to protect their own health, the health of their families, and the County as a whole, in particular those at highest risk of serious illness. The following basic personal-hygiene measures are recommended to prevent the spread of the virus:

- wear a face covering when in a public space;
- maintain a distance of 6' when in contact with individuals outside of your immediate family;
- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands;
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing;
- avoid handshakes;
- avoid contact with sick people and stay home when you are sick.

Residents who have COVID-19 related questions are encouraged to call the Berrien County Health Department Response Hotline at 1-800-815-5485 and visit www.bchdmi.org/COVID19 for more information.

Spectrum Health Lakeland Revises Visitation Guidelines

Effective June 15, 2020, Spectrum Health Lakeland has revised their visitation guidelines which now allow for one visitor per patient and two visitors for pediatric patients in the hospital setting. No visitors are allowed on the COVID-19 unit. In the outpatient and ambulatory setting, a patient can bring a family member/guest if they are under 21 years old (two family members may accompany minors), need physical assistance to get to and from an appointment, or if the family member is needed to be involved in the consent, plan of treatment, or care. All visitors will be screened upon entering the facility and required to wear a mask.

Pine Ridge Rehabilitation and Nursing Center and Hanson Hospice Center continue to following state and federal guidelines and remain closed to all visitors at this time. For special circumstances, including end of life, one visitor meeting certain health criteria will be permitted at these facilities. For more information regarding visitation at Lakeland facilities, visit spectrumhealthlakeland.org/covid19.

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