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MDHHS to provide COVID tests to educators to keep staff, students and community safe as schools offer in-person learning

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LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is moving forward with plans to offer a voluntary COVID-19 testing program that will provide weekly tests to educators.

The MI Safe Schools Testing Program will help achieve Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's goal of having all Michigan school districts offer an in-person learning option for students by March 1.

The COVID-19 rapid antigen testing program is beginning today. The program is for Michigan educators from both public and private schools. MDHHS is providing testing supplies to schools at no cost.

Approximately 300 schools and 9,000 staff have signed up for testing so far.

“Voluntary testing of educators is part of the larger state strategy of keeping students, staff and communities safe while giving children the in-person instruction that they need to learn, develop and grow,” said MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel. “Our dedicated teachers are among the frontline workers who have stepped up during this pandemic. Giving them an opportunity to be regularly tested recognizes their sacrifices and keeps everyone safer.”

The rapid antigen testing program is modeled after Michigan’s successful pilot project that tested student-athletes and coaches who were participating in playoffs for high school fall sports such as football. In that program more than 8,300 people were tested. The rigorous testing program resulted in the detection of 69 asymptomatic COVID-19 cases that otherwise could have been missed.

On Jan. 8 MDHHS announced COVID-19 guidance for schools that went along with the goal of an in-person instruction option in all school districts by March 1. The guidance included availability of testing for educators.

Today, Hertel and Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and MDHHS chief deputy director for health, signed orders authorizing testing in non-health-care settings such as schools.

“Testing is the way we are going to be able to identify cases of COVID-19 and reduce the spread of this virus. Signing this order today helps make sure we are eliminating as many barriers to testing as possible,” Khaldun said. “We encourage everyone who has symptoms of COVID-19, or who has been exposed, to be tested. Everyone has a role to play in ending this pandemic.”

MDHHS and the CDC continue to emphasize the use of scientifically proven methods of reducing the risk of COVID-19 spread, include wearing masks, ventilation improvements in schools, frequent hand washing and social distancing.

In November, MDHHS paused in-person learning in high schools as part of an order to limit indoor gatherings to address an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths and in hospital occupancy rates.

After case numbers decreased, high schools were permitted to resume in-person classes effective Dec. 21.

The guidance is subject to change. The new orders can be found on the MDHHS website. More information about the MI Safe Schools Testing Program can be found at www.michigan.gov/schoolCOVIDtesting.

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

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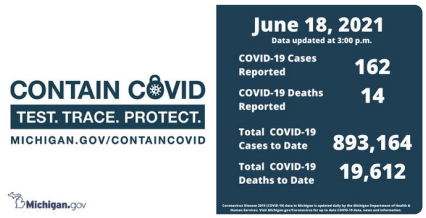
Stay Smart. Stay Safe. @MichiganHHS reports today, June 18, 2021, 162 new COVID-19 cases & 14 deaths. Michigan's total cases are now 893,164 & 19,612 deaths. Find the latest data & #COVID19 news at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus.



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