

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

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Over the past few weeks, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of new daily cases in our region. When community transmission becomes so widespread, our strategies need to pivot to have the most impact. This approach involves quickly identifying and investigating high priority cases such as those who potentially increase the risk for further spread.

In order to both gather and share important information as quickly as possible, we have adopted a new online survey to conduct case investigations with individuals that receive positive COVID-19 test results. Gathering this information from those who test positive helps us to identify those who may spread the virus to others. This is also important in order to initiate isolation and quarantine as soon as possible because any delay to this process can result in unnecessary spread.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan has partnered with Michigan software developer CoherentRX to implement a tool called Patient Education Genius (PEG) for collecting information from individuals who test positive for COVID-19 through a digital survey sent via text message or e-mail. While we began using this tool on a limited basis over this past weekend, the tool will be utilized on a larger scale in response to the recent increase in cases.

When our health department receives notification of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, the PEG system will issue a text message and/or e-mail to the individual. The survey only asks for information that is allowable under the Public Health Code and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA) Privacy Act, such as demographics, symptoms, occupation, attendance at public events or gatherings, and people with whom they may have been in close contact. The survey *does not* gather any private information like social security numbers, personal passwords, or banking details.

Individuals aged 18-70 years will receive an electronic message asking them to fill out this confidential survey. People under age 18 and older than 70 will continue to receive a phone call from the health department to complete case investigation. If someone does not fill out or complete the digital survey, they will receive a call from a case investigator to gather this information.

Using the link received in a text or e-mail, the patient will also be able to view and locate other information regarding isolation and quarantine, as well as the local resources available to assist with meeting basic needs.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

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