



September 30, 2021

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency
Forced to Rescind Public Health Quarantine Order or Face Defunding**

Coldwater, MI – The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is being forced to rescind the September 22nd public health order requiring that employers, educational institutions, and persons in Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph Counties quarantine after a close contact exposure with a person infected with COVID-19 – or face a loss of approximately \$1 million in state budget funding.

The order is rescinded as of 11:59 pm tonight, September 30, 2021. The decision was made after Governor Whitmer signed the 2022 state budget bill on Wednesday which contained language that threatened the loss of funding for essential local public health services. According to boilerplate language in Senate Bill 82 and House Bill 4400, any health officer that has an emergency order under section 2453 of the public health code, 1978 PA 368, MCL 333.2453, in effect as of October 1, 2021, will lose that funding. Although Governor Whitmer stated after the bill signing that this language is unconstitutional, BHSJCHA legal counsel has advised that it stands until proven otherwise in a court of law.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency cannot risk losing this essential local public funding that supports vital community programs and services including immunizations, infectious disease control, sexually transmitted disease control and prevention, hearing screening, vision services, food protection, public water supply, private groundwater supply and on-site sewage management.

Although local health departments are unable to enact public health orders to protect against COVID-19 without jeopardizing funding, businesses, educational institutions, and individuals can institute mitigation factors that help to prevent transmission of COVID-19 including quarantining

individuals that have had a close contact, requiring masks be worn indoors, keeping sick people at home and getting vaccinated when eligible.

“I am particularly concerned about those children that remain unprotected against COVID-19 because they are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine,” states Rebecca Burns, Health Officer. “Local health departments in Michigan are having to choose between safeguarding individuals from the threat of COVID-19 and the future funding of essential local public health programs. We make these decisions with grave concern over the health of our communities.”

Under the Michigan Public Health Code, local public health officers are authorized to “take actions and make determinations necessary or appropriate to carry out the local health departments functions to protect the public health and prevent disease”. Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph Counties have experienced ongoing, sustained high transmission of COVID-19 since mid-July to early-August depending on the county. Businesses, educational institutions, and individuals are urged to wear a mask when in indoor public spaces, to stay home and get tested when they have symptoms of COVID-19, and to quarantine after they have had a close contact exposure with someone who has COVID-19.

“Mitigation actions work to prevent COVID-19,” stated Medical Director Dr. H Lauren Vogel. “Studies have been conducted and the science is clear that wearing a mask, testing when symptomatic, getting vaccinated, and staying home after exposure are essential actions that everyone can take to prevent disease. Working together, we can put COVID-19 behind us and resume life as we remember it before the pandemic.”

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing health care, and protecting the environment. For more information, contact your local office, visit www.bhsj.org, follow us on Facebook www.facebook.com/BHSJCHA or Instagram www.instagram.com/bhsj_healthagency.

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