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PERSONAL HEALTH DIVISION

For Immediate Release

March 15, 2022

Looking back on first COVID-19 case 2 years ago

For the past two years, northern Michigan residents have been living with COVID-19 in their lives. Tomorrow, Wednesday, March 16, marks the two-year anniversary from the date when the first COVID-19 case was reported in a Leelanau County resident.

Since then, the community has pulled together to get vaccinated, wear their masks, wash their hands, and socially distance to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. Today, we are celebrating relatively low numbers of cases and the ability to gather with family and friends in our community.

On this anniversary, it is important to remember the sacrifices made that have led us to this recovery phase, said officials with the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department.

In the early stages of the virus spread, personal protective equipment was sparse, a vaccine was nonexistent, and little was known about this new coronavirus. Yet, Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department staff, as well as health officials with hospitals and emergency management systems, government, schools, and business owners all came together to battle this virus affecting all our lives.

“From day one, Health Department staff have shifted responsibilities quickly and without question to meet the needs of the community, whether through helping with case investigation, testing, or vaccinations,” said Michelle Klein, Director of Personal Health. “Staff’s primary responsibility was to help keep the community safe and they went to extreme lengths to do so.”

On December 18, 2020, the COVID-19 vaccine arrived, and “we administered our first dose that day with first responder clinics planned for both counties over the next few days” Klein said. “Staff were prepared and ready and did an exceptional job of implementing our community vaccination plans. Community members had tears in their eyes as they entered our clinics and felt a sense of hope in protecting themselves and their families. The words of appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to be vaccinated as well as the operation of the community vaccination clinics kept the staff going as they administered over 25,000 vaccines since that first shot,” she added.

Medical Director Dr. Josh Meyerson noted that over the past two years much has been learned about the transmission of what was a novel virus. “Since then, we have lost nearly a million U.S. lives, but with time have progressed from initially having limited resources and tools to prevent and treat COVID-19 disease to the availability of life saving vaccines and treatments that will, going forward, greatly reduce the public health impact of the pandemic,” Dr. Meyerson said.

Health Officer Lisa Peacock thanked the staff and the community for their efforts. “I can’t express the gratitude I feel for our dedicated staff, community partners, and our community as a whole. It takes all of us to ensure the public health system functions effectively and northern Michigan is a shining example of partnership and collaboration!” Peacock added.

Data collected by the health department show that since March 13, 2020, in the two-county jurisdiction of Benzie and Leelanau counties:

- More than 6,900 cases have been reported and 97 COVID-19-related deaths have been reported as of March 15th, 2022. Each death is a tragedy, sadly affecting loved ones and friends, and impacting our community in many ways, health officials stress. And, many more people have been hospitalized, and some still live today with lasting symptoms.
- Over 70,000 vaccines have been administered by the health department, health providers, and pharmacies. Of these doses, over 75% were primary series and the remaining were either additional or booster doses. Of that total, over a third of the doses have been administered by the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department at more than 250 clinics across the region.
- More than 82% of residents 16 and older have received at least one dose.

While it is great news that we are in the [recovery phase](#), as defined by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, it is still advisable to take precautions based on your individual health conditions and feelings about risk for you and your family. Additional information can be found:

- MDHHS [updated guidance on masking](#)
- The CDC's new [COVID-19 Community Levels](#)
- The health department [convenient COVID-19 vaccination clinics](#) across its four-county region of Benzie and Leelanau counties.
- The health department [testing clinics](#) availability and no symptoms or doctor's order is necessary. All ages are welcome, and no appointment is needed, although pre-registration via [this link](#) or by calling 231-882-2197, will save time at the testing location.

Stay up to date on the latest information in the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department jurisdiction by [liking and following our Facebook page](#) and visiting our [COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#). To locate a testing facility, visit the [Michigan COVID-19 Test Finder website](#). To track the risk levels of COVID-19 pandemic indicators, visit the [MI Safe Start Map website](#). For more information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, visit the MDHHS [vaccine website](#) or the [CDC vaccine website](#).

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