



September 24, 2021

Statement from Colette Scrimger, Health Officer of BEDHD, regarding the Board of Health meeting on September 23, 2021

At yesterday's Board of Health meeting, we listened to nearly 5 hours of public comments regarding the two [emergency public health orders I issued](#) regarding school masking and quarantine/isolation in schools. After public comment, I read a statement clarifying my position on these orders, followed by our staff who presented data and facts regarding COVID-19 in Barry and Eaton counties. During the second public comment period the last person to speak stated that he was placing me under citizen's arrest for impersonating an officer. He then demanded that law enforcement in the room take me into custody. Law enforcement officers determined that they would not take me into custody. The BOH meeting was adjourned with no further action/comment from Board members. Law enforcement has stated that they would continue to investigate the person's claim. I have been informed they have no basis for arresting me and in fact, they could be charged for falsely conducting a citizen's arrest.

While we support the right for people to peacefully protest, as well as people to provide feedback and public comment at public meetings, it is important that folks do that civilly and responsibly. The safety of everyone concerned is at the top of my mind. While many people have differing views on the necessary mitigation measures, as a public health officer I base my decisions on the best science available, patterns in the local spread of disease, and the opinions and recommendations of experts in the field of public health.

For the last 18 months Barry-Eaton District Health Department staff have been working diligently to fulfill our duties as the local public health department responding to a global pandemic. In the 23 years I have worked for BEDHD, we have never experienced a crisis of this size, duration, and with this level of chaos. I am incredibly proud of the work the staff have done during this time. We have strived to base our actions on the best information available to us as public health experts during a time when information has been politicized, misused, and/or constantly evolving. Misinformation has been one of the greatest challenges we have faced during the last 18 months. With information easy to come by through the internet and social media, false information circulates quickly creating confusion and mistrust among many.

Under the Michigan Public Health Code, State Law, I have a statutory duty to prevent an imminent danger in the community that could cause disease, death or physical harm. The Public Health Code gives me the authority to issue orders that help mitigate spread of disease during an epidemic. This duty is assigned to me, not the Board of Health or the Board of Commissioners.

Over the past couple of months, I have spoken to many, many people in our community regarding masks in schools—both for and against. I have had numerous meetings with school officials to discuss the same. I have consulted with our health care systems. I have read emails and listened to public comment at various meetings. I have worked with staff to explore all options in search of the most effective way to reduce the spread of this disease in our community. I have studied the data of our local community, our region, the state of Michigan and the country. In the end, I determined the issuance of these two orders was in the best interest of our district and was a necessary step to increase the likelihood our schools will be able to stay open AND reduce the spread of disease and the incidence of severe illness/death in our community.

This was not an easy decision to make. However, I take my duties as a Health Officer seriously. I have worked in the district for 23 years, I am a resident of this district and my youngest child attends school in the district. I have witnessed the harm COVID has caused for individuals and families. I have heard the concerns of our health care partners regarding climbing numbers and the impact on their systems. I too would like COVID to be over so we can go back to normal. But we aren't there yet. Individuals and families continue to be impacted and the virus continues to evolve. This is a disease that doesn't just affect individuals. If that was the case, individual choice would make sense. However, this disease is spread easily from person to person. One person expressing their individual choice to not wear a mask can have a devastating impact on the individuals surrounding them.

We constantly review a variety of data points in order to track the impact and spread of COVID-19 in our community. Our team of case investigators and public health data experts investigate outbreaks and examine community conditions and disease trends. As the pandemic has evolved, we have adapted our methods to consider case counts and population rates, geographic, age, and setting distribution, hospitalizations, deaths, health system capacity, vaccination rates and patterns, and testing data. We will evaluate the community situation across the district using all available information to determine when masking and quarantine/isolation orders are no longer necessary for educational settings and at that time, I will rescind the orders.