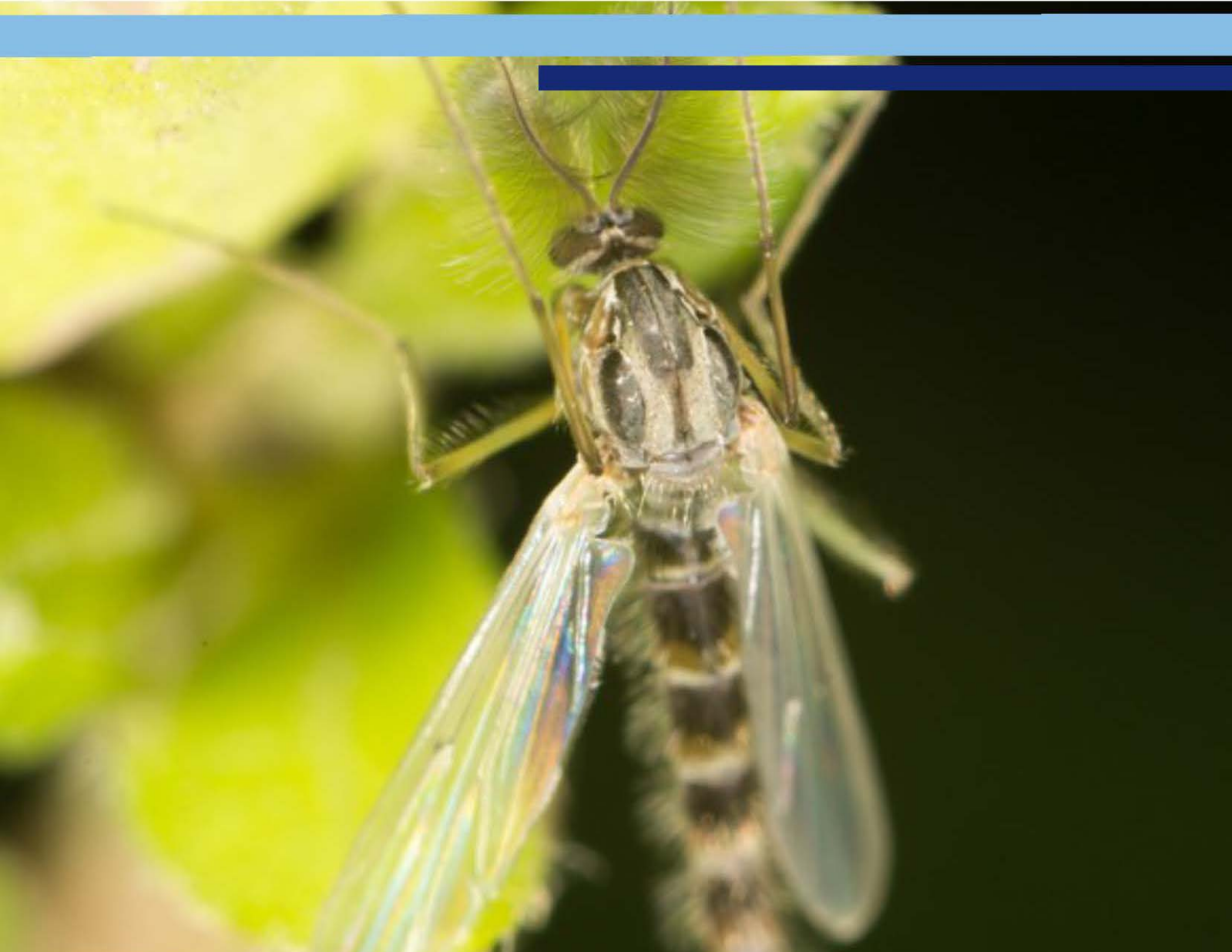
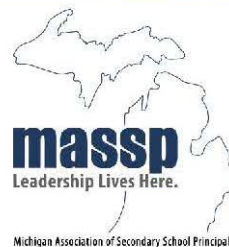


# Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis



Michigan School  
Public Relations  
Association



# Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis

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***“Michigan is currently experiencing its worst Eastern Equine Encephalitis outbreak in more than a decade. The ongoing cases reported in humans and animals and the severity of this disease illustrate the importance of taking precautions against mosquito bites.”***

*-Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, Chief Medical Executive and Chief Deputy for Health  
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services  
September 2019*

## **Welcome to this Communication Toolkit.**

***This resource highlights some of the ways school districts may choose to communicate about Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). Always consider your school’s policies, codes of conduct, local community needs, and your local climate as you address the information needs of your stakeholders.***

***Please remember to direct questions or inquiries about EEE to your health department/division.***

Prepared by:



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## Introduction: EEE is a Serious Issue.

### [State taking action to prevent further Eastern Equine Encephalitis cases](#)

As of September 17, 2019, Michigan residents are being strongly advised by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to protect themselves from mosquito bites as four additional cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) have been confirmed in Southwest Michigan – including two that were fatal.

MDHHS is taking further action to protect the public health as the mosquito-borne disease remains a threat that has now resulted in seven confirmed human cases of EEE in Michigan with onset dates in July. The new cases expand the geographic area affected by human EEE cases to include Barry, Cass and Van Buren counties, along with previously identified cases in Kalamazoo and Berrien counties. Two of these additional cases, in Cass and Van Buren counties, were fatal, as was an earlier case in Kalamazoo County.

MDHHS is encouraging local officials in the five Southwest Michigan counties that have been impacted by human EEE cases and St. Joseph, Genesee and Lapeer counties – which have had animal EEE cases – to consider postponing, rescheduling or cancelling outdoor activities occurring at or after dusk, particularly activities that involve children. This would include events such as late evening sports practices or games or outdoor music practices. The MDHHS recommendation is being made out of an abundance of caution to protect the public health and applies until the first hard frost of the year. **If you have questions or need more information, contact Bob Wheaton, 517-241-2112, [wheatonb@michigan.gov](mailto:wheatonb@michigan.gov).**

### ***MDHHS Recommends ALL Michigan Residents Follow These Steps To Avoid Mosquito Bites:***

- ***Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-registered product to exposed skin or clothing, and always follow the manufacturer's directions for use.***
- ***Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites.***
- ***Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside.***
- ***Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires, or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.***
- ***Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.***

## Use this Resource to Communicate.

This resource is organized according to the **RPIE** (Research, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation) process used by **school communicators** across the nation. **This process enables the schools to design and maintain a comprehensive, planned, two-way communication program** that helps build mutual understanding and support between the schools and its publics. The RPIE process involves four steps:

- 1) **Research:** Identify the issue and gather relevant information—through your own investigation/first-hand experience and/or that which is reported by others.
- 2) **Planning:** Use your research to develop a communication plan and messages; use identified tools to communicate with your target publics/audiences.
- 3) **Implementation:** Follow the steps in your communication plan to manage the information/seek input.
- 4) **Evaluation:** Examine your communication efforts to determine if communication goals were met. Use evaluation results to modify your communication plan, if needed.

If you have questions about the RPIE process or school public relations please contact MSPRA [www.mspra.org](http://www.mspra.org).

## 1) Begin with Research.

- Identify information (re)sources.
- Contact your county health department/division. If needed, see [Map to County Offices](#) with contact information.
- Discover your area's status as it relates to Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).
- Ask your county health department/division:
  - Are you currently investigating any cases of EEE in our area?
  - Is there any current EEE advisory in place for our area?
  - Do you have any plans to issue an EEE advisory for our area?
  - What's the best link to share with our families and school community for updates?
- Discover if your schools have upcoming outdoor activities scheduled between dusk and dawn.
- Seek out and use information from existing resources.
  - Query your professional organization's list serv.
  - Contact other districts in your immediate area.
  - Check with your legal counsel. (Thrun Law Firm has issued a legal opinion on this issue. Thrun clients have received it. If your district is represented by other legal counsel, you may want to ask for a legal opinion.)
  - Read the MDHHS [news release](#).
  - Review the [CDC guidance](#) on prevention.
  - Go to Michigan [Emerging Disease Issues](#).
  - Download *Fight the Bite* [Infographic](#) from the Allegan County Health Department (or see page 15 of this document).

## 2) Plan your Communication.

- Identify target audiences and key messages. What do your audiences need to know?
- Identify effective communication tools. How does each audience receive its information?
- Assign tasks and establish a timeline. Who is going to do what, when?
- Identify a primary contact person. Who will coordinate the overall communication effort?

## 3) Implement your Plan.

### Develop Talking Points/Key Messages.

- Our primary concern is for the health and safety of our students, staff, and coaches.
- Our schools have been closely monitoring the situation regarding Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)—a mosquito-borne disease.
- We are following the guidance of our county health department/division and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). We are also following our board policy.
- At this time, our county health department **has/has not** recommended cancellation of outdoor evening events or activities.
- **If cancellation is not recommended**, cite the factors considered for maintaining current outdoor activity schedules at this time. (See box below for some factors.)
- **If cancellation is recommended**, cite specific modifications that will be made: events will be moved to earlier times, moved indoors, etc.
- The district has been monitoring playgrounds, athletic fields, and other property to eliminate any standing water that could encourage mosquitoes to breed.
- We will continue to watch the developments surrounding EEE closely, and will take the appropriate steps necessary to protect the health of all of our students, coaches, and staff.

### ***If Cancellation of Evening Outdoor Events or Activities IS NOT Recommended***

*Cite factors that were considered for maintaining current outdoor activity schedules, such as:*

- *Elementary recess takes place during the day when the risk is lowest.*
- *Nearly all practices take place immediately after school during daylight hours.*
- *Many outdoor athletic contests take place on hard surfaces or artificial turf fields, a factor known to prevent mosquitoes from breeding and thereby reducing the risk of contact.*
- *For other activities that do take place at or after dusk, or in more natural areas (i.e. Cross Country and Golf, Marching Band), we encourage our students, coaches, and staff to follow the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services recommendations to reduce their risk.*

## Communicate With Your Audiences.

- Include the link to health department/division updates in all your materials and posts.
  - Consider using these social media posts:
    - We've talked to our health department **on this date at this time** and there are currently no cases of EEE in our county; as of **this date and time** there are no advisories.
    - We know this information can change quickly. Please contact your health department/division directly for the latest information.
- OR**
- We are following the lead of our health department/division as it relates to EEE. Here is the link to our health department's/division's most recent information.
  - Remind everyone: Regardless of the local advisory status, take precautions to avoid mosquito bites. (Post with *Fight the Bite* [Infographic](#); also linked on page 5 and included on page 15.)
  - Remember: Students/school groups may travel outside of the district to participate in sporting events, camps, and other outdoor activities. And, mosquitoes aren't bound by county lines.

### Board/Administration

- Review your board policy.
- Follow your county health department's/division's recommended course of action.

### School Staff

- Remind staff to take recommended precautions with any outdoor activities.
- Provide talking points to staff to share with community members who ask questions.

### Students

- Remind students to take recommended precautions with any outdoor activities.

### Parents

- Repeat your key message about keeping students safe.
- Remind parents to take recommended precautions with any outdoor activities.

### Media

- Designate a spokesperson.
- Use your key messages.
- Understand that you don't have to allow the media into your buildings, parking lots, or campus.
- Know that there is nothing to prevent them from setting up outside, across the street.

### Community Members

- Remind them that schools are not the experts in this area. We rely on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and county health departments/divisions for [information](#) and [guidance](#).
- Remind community members to take recommended precautions with any outdoor activities.

## **Required Notification Reminder**

***If the district plans to fog or spray for mosquitoes, remember to provide timely pre-notification to students' parents or guardians and the school staff of pesticide treatments per the requirements under the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act 451, Part 83. Click [here](#) for details.***

## 4) Evaluate your Communication.

- Keep track of EEE-related phone calls and inquiries.
- Monitor rescheduled/relocated events to determine if/how communication could be improved.
- Ask for feedback.
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What would you do differently?
- Adjust your communication plan for next time based on your evaluation.

**Source: M-Live**

### [New case of mosquito-borne illness reported in Southwest Michigan](#)

*Updated Sep 20, 7:55 PM; Posted Sep 20, 7:49 PM*

By [Ryan Boldrey](#) | [rboldrey@mlive.com](mailto:rboldrey@mlive.com)

**CALHOUN COUNTY, MI** — *An eighth case of Eastern equine encephalitis has been confirmed in Southwest Michigan, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.*

*The latest diagnosis belongs to an adult resident of Calhoun County. The seven prior cases have been found in Barry, Cass, Van Buren, Berrien and Kalamazoo counties.*

*Three of those confirmed cases have resulted in deaths.*

*EEE is one of the most dangerous mosquito-borne diseases in the United States, with a 33 percent fatality rate in people who become ill, according to the MDHHS.*

*“The increasing geographic spread and increasing number of EEE cases in humans and animals indicate that the risk for EEE is ongoing,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, MDHHS Chief Medical Executive and Chief Deputy for Health. “We continue to urge Michiganders to protect themselves against mosquito bites until the first hard frost.”*

*As of Sept. 20, EEE has also been confirmed in 21 animals from 11 counties: Barry, Berrien, Calhoun, Cass, Genesee, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Lapeer, Montcalm, St. Joseph, and Van Buren.*

*-end-*



# Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis

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## Resources: Letters/Other Communication

### Berrien RESA Website Post



September 18, 2019  
For Immediate Release



#### Health Department Recommends Actions to Protect Against Eastern Equine Encephalitis

(Berrien County, MI) – With an increase in cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis reported yesterday throughout the state of Michigan, officials at the Berrien County Health Department continue to emphasize that residents take personal precautions to prevent mosquito bites.

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) is a rare virus that is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. As of today, there is one confirmed case of EEE in Berrien County as well as one suspected case that is pending confirmatory testing. To date, there have been seven confirmed cases of EEE throughout the state of Michigan in 2019.

Although there have been elevated numbers of EEE cases in Michigan this year, the illness remains extremely rare. Not all mosquitos are capable of transmitting the virus, and not all cases of EEE result in severe symptoms. Mosquitos that can carry the EEE virus tend to favor woodland and/or swampy habitats. Individual cases of EEE are more likely to occur in those over the age of 50, under the age of 15, or those who may have weakened immune systems from underlying medical conditions or treatments.

At this time, the Berrien County Health Department is not recommending that community groups cancel outdoor evening events, such as sporting events. If practical, groups can consider relocating outdoor events to an indoor space. The Health Department is recommending the following actions be taken:

- When outdoors, apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-registered product to exposed skin or clothing, and always follow the manufacturer's directions for use.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites.
- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside.
- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools old tires or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.

The Berrien County Health Department is working collaboratively with leadership at Berrien County school districts to take actions where needed and communicate directly with students and families.

It is important to remember that while serious, the risk of contracting EEE is very low. As we head into the season where the risk of contracting the flu is relatively much higher, the Health Department continues to urge that families get a flu vaccination for everyone in their household who is 6 months or older.

More information regarding EEE can be found at [www.bchdmi.org](http://www.bchdmi.org) or [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases).

###

# Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis

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## Joint Communication Superintendents in KRESA



**Every child, every opportunity, every time!**

**Susan L. Coney**  
Director

### Office of Communications

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*This press release is being sent on behalf of all nine Kalamazoo County superintendents:*

Doug Newington  
Superintendent of Climax-Scotts Community Schools

Dr. Jeff Thoenes  
Superintendent of Comstock Public Schools

Wendy Somers  
Superintendent of Galesburg-Augusta Community Schools

Raphael Rittenhouse  
Superintendent of Gull Lake Community Schools

Gary Start  
Interim Superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools

Dave Campbell  
Superintendent of Kalamazoo RESA

Jason Misner  
Superintendent of Parchment Schools

Mark Bielang  
Superintendent of Portage Public Schools

Dr. Rusty Stitt  
Superintendent of Schoolcraft Community Schools

Keevin O'Neill  
Superintendent of Vicksburg Community Schools

### **KALAMAZOO COUNTY SCHOOLS MAKING SCHEDULE CHANGES TO REDUCE RISK OF EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS**

*Each school district will announce the specific time and/or date changes*

After further deliberation and consultation with the Kalamazoo County Health Officer, all nine superintendents in the KRESA (Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency) have agreed to make schedule changes for outdoor activities, to the extent possible, to reduce exposure to EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis). Each school district will announce the specific time and/or date changes once the arrangements have been made.

This adjustment of times will continue until there is further guidance from the County Health Officer that the risk of mosquito bites has been greatly reduced or eliminated. Although sports and outdoor activities are an important part of a child's education, nothing is more important than their health and safety.

- # # # -

# Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis

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## Letter Kalamazoo Public Schools



Gary L. Start  
Interim Superintendent

Office of the Superintendent  
1220 Howard Street  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008  
(269) 337-0123 \* Fax (269) 337-0149  
TDD (269) 337-0152  
www.kalamazoopublicschools.com  
e-mail startgl@kalamazoopublicschools.net

September 2019

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The purpose of this letter is to share information on steps you can take to protect your family from mosquito bites. Recently, two cases of a *rare* mosquito-borne disease known as Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) were confirmed in Kalamazoo County residents; other possible cases are under investigation.

People can become infected with the EEE virus from the bite of a mosquito carrying the virus. It cannot be transmitted person to person or horse to person or deer to person. Early symptoms of EEE include the sudden onset of headache, high fever, chills, body and joint aches. Symptoms usually appear 4-10 days after exposure. EEE can develop into severe encephalitis (brain swelling), resulting in headache, disorientation, tremors, seizures and paralysis. Permanent brain damage, coma and death may also occur in some cases. Most people who are infected with the virus that causes EEE do not become ill. However, persons below the age of 15 or above the age of 50 have great risk of developing a severe infection.

Families can stay healthy by following steps to avoid mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus or para-menthane diol, and 2-undecanone; follow the product label instructions and reapply as directed.
  - Don't use repellent on children under 2 months old. Instead dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs and cover crib, stroller and baby carrier with mosquito netting.
- Wearing shoes and socks, light-colored long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors.
- Making sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens.
- Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings.
- Using bed nets when sleeping outdoors or in conditions with no window screens.
- Eliminating all sources of standing water that can support mosquito breeding around your home, including water in bird baths, abandoned swimming pools, wading pools, old tires and any other object holding water once a week.
- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas
- Avoid outdoor activities from dusk until dawn when the mosquito species that transmits the EEE virus to humans is most active.

If you have any questions, please contact your healthcare provider or the Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department at 269-373-5200 or visit [michigan.gov/eee](http://michigan.gov/eee) or [cdc.gov/eee](http://cdc.gov/eee).

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Gary L. Start in black ink.

Gary L. Start  
Interim Superintendent

Handwritten signature of Nkenge A. Bergan in black ink.

Nkenge A. Bergan  
Director of Student Services

## Letter Otsego Public Schools

# Otsego Public Schools

*September 19, 2019*

### Message regarding Eastern Equine Encephalitis

Dear Otsego school families,

As you may have heard, state and local health officials are urging caution after several cases of a rare, mosquito-borne virus called Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) have been reported in eight Michigan counties, including Van Buren, Cass, Berrien and Kalamazoo. There have been some recommendations in those affected counties to consider cancelling or postponing evening events when mosquitoes are more active. While Alamo Elementary is in Kalamazoo County, there are currently no evening events that we need to adjust.

At this time, there have been no reported cases of EEE in horses or humans in Allegan County, so the Allegan County Health Department has not recommended cancellation of evening events or activities. However, we encourage our students, families, coaches, and staff to follow the recommendations contained in the Allegan County Health Department communication released today. (attached below.)

We will continue to watch the developments surrounding EEE closely, and will take the appropriate steps necessary to protect the health of all of our students and staff and will pass along any further information as it becomes available.

Thank you,

Jeffery Haase  
Otsego Public Schools Superintendent

[Allegan County Health Dept. News Release](#)

["Fight the Bite" Infographic from the ACHD](#)

[Additional information from the CDC on prevention](#)

## Communication Oxford Community Schools



September 18, 2019

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As you may have heard, state and local health officials are urging caution after several cases of a rare, mosquito-borne virus called Eastern Equine Encephalitis have been reported in eight Michigan counties, including Lapeer.

Due to our proximity to Lapeer County, we believe it wise, for the safety of our students, to share the recommendations of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services:

“MDHHS is encouraging local officials in the five Southwest Michigan counties that have been impacted by human EEE cases and St. Joseph, Genesee, and Lapeer counties – which have had animal EEE cases – to consider postponing, rescheduling or canceling outdoor activities occurring at or after dusk, particularly activities that involve children. This would include events such as late evening sports practices or games or outdoor music practices. The MDHHS recommendation is being made out of an abundance of caution to protect the public health and applies until the first hard frost of the year.

There have not been any reported human cases of EEE in Lapeer County, but parents should still exercise caution with young people. This advice should be followed until the first hard frost of the fall. At this time, the Lapeer County Health Department has not recommended cancellation of evening events or activities.

As a precaution because of our proximity to Lapeer County, Saturday, September 21, 2019, Oxford Community Schools will be applying a mosquito treatment (see attachment) in the areas surrounding the practice and playing fields of OHS and OMS where district evening events take place. The actual playing surfaces will not be treated with pesticide. At this time, we will continue our regularly scheduled evening events. [Click here](#) for guidance from the CDC on prevention.



---

September 19, 2019

Dear Oxford Parents and Guardians,

In consideration of the effects of the EEE virus and the minimal cost to the district to spray for mosquitos, we believe it is in the best interest of our students to expand the areas that will be treated as was previously communicated in yesterday's (September 18, 2019) district-wide email.

On Saturday, September 21, 2019, the parameters of each elementary building play area will receive the same mosquito treatment as the areas surrounding the practice and playing fields of OMS and OHS.

Please keep in mind the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services advice that all Michigan residents can stay healthy by following these steps to avoid mosquito bites:

- \* Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-registered product to exposed skin or clothing, and always follow the manufacturer's directions for use.
- \* Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites.
- \* Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside.
- \* Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home, such as buckets, unused kiddie pools, old tires or similar sites where mosquitoes may lay eggs.
- \* Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas.

## Letter Portage Public Schools



Portage Public Schools has been closely following the situation in West Michigan regarding Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). We will continue to be diligent in evaluating the risks of EEE.

After careful consideration, Portage Public Schools will maintain current outdoor activity schedules at this time. The factors contributing to this decision include the following:

- Elementary recess takes place during the day when the risk is lowest.
- Nearly all practices take place immediately after school during daylight hours.
- Many outdoor athletic contests take place on hard surfaces or artificial turf fields, a factor known to prevent mosquitoes from breeding and thereby reducing the risk of contact.
- For activities that do take place at or after dusk, or in more natural areas (i.e. Cross Country, Golf, and Marching Band), we encourage our students, coaches, and staff to follow the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services recommendations to reduce their risk:
  - Apply insect repellent prior to spending time outdoors. If you choose to apply insect repellent to your elementary student, please do so prior to the start of the school day.
  - Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants when possible.
  - Be aware of the signs of EEE and contact your doctor immediately, should your student experience any symptoms.
- Other precautions to be taken at home, in addition to all of the above, include:
  - Maintaining window and door screens;
  - Using nets or fans over outdoor eating areas.

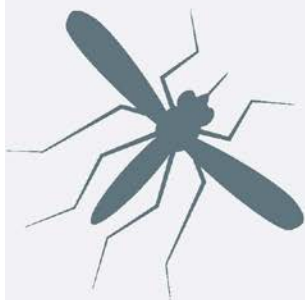
Additionally, the District has been diligent to monitor playgrounds, athletic fields, and other property to eliminate any standing water that could encourage mosquitoes to breed.

We will continue to watch the developments surrounding EEE closely, and will take the appropriate steps necessary to protect the health of all of our students, coaches and staff.

For more information about EEE, please connect with the [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) or the [Kalamazoo County Health Department](#).

-end-

## Infographic Allegan County Health Department



### FIGHT THE BITE

Mosquitoes can spread disease, like EEE and West Nile Virus. Infections happen even when mosquito bite numbers are low. Keep you and your loved ones healthy and safe from mosquito bites with these steps.

- Apply insect repellents that contain the active ingredient DEET, or other U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-registered product to exposed skin or clothing, and always follow the manufacturer's directions for use



- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors. Apply insect repellent to clothing to help prevent bites



- Maintain window and door screening to help keep mosquitoes outside



- Empty water from mosquito breeding sites around the home where mosquitoes may lay eggs, such as
  - buckets
  - unused kiddie pools
  - old tires



- Use nets and/or fans over outdoor eating areas

