DATE: November 13, 2020
TO: Elkhart County Residents
FROM: Elkhart County Elected Officials and Community Leaders
SUBJECT: New Covid-19 Public Health Order

Dear Elkhart County Residents:

We are seeing a dramatic spike in new COVID-19 cases in Elkhart County and the rate of infection is growing exponentially. According to health officials, the total number of cases here has now reached 12,500, putting us near the top among all counties in the state. The spread of this virus has already meant the loss of 170 of our residents, and unfortunately this number will continue to rise. Our hospitals are struggling to treat the dramatic increase in new cases and we know that this situation will only worsen as many more patients seek emergency medical treatment in the weeks ahead. As we can all agree, the current trajectory we are on as a county is unacceptable.

As elected officials and community leaders, our number one priority is to protect the health and safety of our residents. Because of the current crisis, we have been working diligently to intensify our efforts to protect you and your family members from this highly contagious and very dangerous virus. As a result, we have urged the Elkhart County Health Department, headed up by Dr. Lydia Mertz and her staff, to issue a new Public Health Order designed to more significantly mitigate the spread of the virus. Although this order is still being developed, we wanted to provide some general information to the community about the measures that will be included.

This Public Health Order will focus on four community environments where transmission of the virus is most occurring. The order will include specific requirements for measures that must be implemented within these environments in order to control the spread of the virus. These specific areas are identified as:

1.   Businesses and Entities
2.   Restaurants, Bars, and Entertainment Venues
3.   School Sponsored Events
4.   Gatherings, Meetings, and Events

The new Public Health Order will provide clear direction on the protective measures that are to be implemented in each of these environments. Examples of protective measures include social distancing, face masks, sanitation, occupancy limits and other practices known to reduce transmission of the virus. The goal of the order will be to protect Elkhart County residents from infection and reduce the number of deaths in our county. It is important to note that we want to do this while keeping the economy open. This is a concern among all of us and we want to avoid the negative economic impact we experienced earlier this year when the economy was shut down under the Governor's Executive Order.

The Elkhart County Health Department is granted the authority by the State of Indiana to issue such public health orders to protect residents from the spread of communicable diseases, including the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Local health departments are also given tools to enforce public health orders. These tools can include the imposition of fines and penalties for violations. While it is our hope and desire to seek voluntary compliance through education, the order will include the option of issuing fines and taking legal action where necessary. More details about this enforcement will accompany the new Public Health Order.

Given the urgency of the pandemic, the Health Department plans to have the Public Health Order issued no later than Friday, November 20th. Once the order is issued, restrictions will be reduced when there is clear evidence the transmission of the virus is being reduced. Several indicators will be used to monitor the spread of the virus, including:

1.   Local hospitalization rates
2.   Number of new weekly cases
3.   Hospital Intensive Care Unit (ICU) capacity
4.   Covid related deaths

We, the undersigned elected officials and community leaders, strongly support the work of the Elkhart County Health Department to develop and adopt a new Public Health Order that will help protect our residents from being infected by the coronavirus while also keeping our economy open. We are resolved to protect the health of all residents while maintaining the economic vitality of our community.

Elkhart County Commissioners and Mayors further pledge to work closely with the Health Department to enforce these new provisions in a reasonable manner.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sincerely,

Commissioner Frank Lucchese	Mayor Phil Jenkins
Commissioner Suzie Weirick	Mayor Rod Roberson
Commissioner Mike Yoder	Mayor Jeremy Stutsman

Public Safety:

Kristofer Seymore, Elkhart Chief of Police	Shaun Edgerton, Elkhart Fire Chief
Jose Miller, Goshen Chief of Police	Dan Sink, Goshen Fire Chief
Steve Rulli, Nappanee Chief of Police	Don Lehman, Nappanee Fire Chief
Jim Sumpter, EMS Director	

Elkhart County Council

Randy Yohn	Doug Graham

Elkhart City Council

H. Brent Curry	Aaron Mishler
David E. Henke	Dwight Fish
Tonda Hines	Mary M. Olson
Arvis Dawson	

Goshen City Council

Megan Eichorn	Julia King
Gilberto Perez Jr.	Matt Schrock
Brett Weddell	

Nappanee City Council

Denny Miller	David Kauffman
Anna Huff	

Health Officials

Randy Christoffel, CEO, Goshen Health

Dr. Dan Nafziger, Chief Medical Officer, Goshen Hospital

Carl Risk, President, Elkhart General Hospital

Dr. Bache, Chief Medical Officer, Elkhart General Hospital

School Superintendents

Jane Allen, Middlebury

Scot Croner, Wanee

Bob Evans, Fairfield

Dan Fuston, Concord

Steve Hope, Goshen

Byron Sanders, Baugo

Steve Thalheimer, Elkhart

Towns

Jeff Beachy, Bristol Town Council

Whitney Pierle, Bristol Town Council

Floyd Lynch, Bristol Town Council

Cathy Burke, Bristol Town Council

Chambers of Commerce

Nick Kieffer, Goshen

Levon Johnson, Elkhart

Jeff Kitson, Nappanee

Business Leaders

Bob Martin, President & CEO, THOR

Colleen Zuhl, SVP CFO, THOR

Todd Woelfer, SVP General Counsel, THOR

Ken Julian, SVP Administration/HR, THOR

Josef Hjelmaker, Chief Innovation Officer, THOR

Galen Miller, CEO, Miller Poultry

Jan Farron, President, Babsco

Bill Rieth, President, United Way of Elkhart County