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## City handing out masks, sanitizer, COVID advice

By RASMUS S. JORGENSEN [rjorgensen@elkhartruth.com](mailto:rjorgensen@elkhartruth.com)  
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The City of Elkhart is giving away 20,000 masks, along with hand sanitizer and COVID-19 guidelines for its Happy ElkHEART Holidays campaign.

Provided

**ELKHART** — The City of Elkhart is spending nearly \$83,000 in federal funds to provide masks, hand

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		\$115	\$115
		\$46	<b>\$46</b>
	▼	SHOP NOW	SHOP NOW

Mayor Rod Roberson's communications director, Corinne Straight-Reed, said the effort is paid for through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, meaning that it will cost the city nothing.

Beyond providing masks and hand sanitizer, the aim for the city is to inform residents that, as the holiday season is here at a time when hundreds of new COVID-19 infections are reported on a daily basis in Elkhart County, individuals need to make an effort for their safety, and the safety of their loved ones and the community. Straight-Reed said that is worth spending \$82,827, though she called it a "jarring" price tag.

"We understand, of course, that people need financial assistance right now. Ideally, \$80,000+ could have gone a long way to provide foods assistance, and other holiday supplies to those in need. The constraints of the federal dollars wouldn't allow for that. We used the money where we could to help who we could," Straight-Reed said.

According to Straight-Reed, the Mayor's Office is getting many requests for masks and support related to COVID-19 education.

It may be tempting for some to set aside the guidelines at a time of the year that, for many, is about spending time with family, according to Straight-Reed, so the administration believes it has a responsibility to reach and educate people about minimizing the risk level.

"You can still wear a mask around your family," she said. "Just because you're at your aunt's house or your grandparents' house, still wear a mask."

Masks come with a print saying "Happy ElkHEART Holidays," and safety guidelines are printed on postcards in English and Spanish.

Volunteers were bagging the masks, hand sanitizer and postcards at The Lerner Theatre on Tuesday before the bags will be distributed through Elkhart Community Schools, Council on Aging and Church Community Services. The first large hand-out of the bags will take place Saturday at Council on Aging, where there will be a drive-thru event. The remaining bags should be distributed over the next week-and-a-half, according to Straight-Reed.



be on-site to help hand out more gift cards from private contributors, in addition to the coronavirus mitigation bags.

The city is also partnering with the Elkhart Community Schools to hand out gift cards to grocery stores to help people who are struggling financially, Straight-Reed said. She and Toney said there is a significant need this year.

“This season, we’re giving away more help for food than we’ve ever done in the past,” Toney said.

The Council on Aging, which by definition works with those who are most at risk because of the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed a large focus on informing seniors on how to stay safe and helping them accomplish that goal by making the organization’s transportation services safer and offering to shop for seniors. Toney said Council on Aging has spent about \$40,000 this year to reduce the risk to its clients while still being able to deliver its most essential services.

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