

On Monday, April 8, Northwest Ohio will get a front-row seat to a total solar eclipse. The moon will gradually begin to block the sun in the early afternoon, and the eclipse will reach totality (meaning the moon will entirely block the sun) at approximately 3:10 p.m.

Only a small region of the United States will experience the total solar eclipse, so Northwest Ohio anticipates visitors from outside the area for this once-in-a-lifetime event. At Blanchard Valley Health System, we encourage our community to plan ahead with health and safety in mind.

Eye safety is vital. Looking directly at the sun without proper protection can cause permanent damage to your vision, even if there does not appear to be much light.

Only look at the eclipse using eclipse glasses that indicate that they comply with ISO 12312-2 requirements. Regular sunglasses do not offer adequate protection. Eclipse glasses are designed for viewing the eclipse without a telescope, camera, or binoculars and should not be used with any of these devices.

Parents with young children may want to rehearse like a fire drill for the eclipse. If your children are familiar with the glasses ahead of time, when things are less exciting, they are more likely to stay safe on April 8.

Traffic congestion is expected, so give yourself extra time to get where you need to go. Make sure you have groceries ahead of time so you don't have to run to the store the day of the eclipse.

Anyone on the road that afternoon should be extra alert for unsafe drivers. People may suddenly pull over as time passes, so be vigilant.

Many organizations are setting out portable toilets, but it will take longer to drive from one place to another. So, again, plan with this in mind, especially if you have small children.

Remember that, while hospitals and urgent care will be open, many medical practices will close or have limited hours.

This means that people feeling sick on Friday, April 5, may want to call their primary care provider to discuss what to do if they start feeling worse over the weekend, as it may be difficult to get a Monday appointment.

Similarly, people who have chronic illnesses and are experiencing a worsening of symptoms may also benefit from reaching out on Thursday or Friday. Make sure you have enough medication to last until Tuesday.

But please seek care immediately if you are experiencing an emergency. Don't just stay home and wait it out. Chest pain or pressure may be symptoms of a heart attack, while numbness or weakness on one side or difficulty speaking may indicate a stroke. These

are medical emergencies; you should head to the emergency room rather than wait to call your doctor. Start by calling 911 to see if an ambulance can quickly reach your house and send EMTs to assist you on your way to the hospital.

If you or a loved one is injured and bleeding significantly, or you suspect a broken bone, get this, too, checked out at the ER or urgent care.

We have been working hard to prepare for any number of possible scenarios for April 8, along with others across the region. We want our community members to enjoy the eclipse. Keep safety in mind and remember that, if you do experience a health crisis, healthcare professionals are ready to help.

More information can be found at bvhealthsystem.org/eclipse

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