

Committee to Protect Medicare: Wisconsin doctors again tell Trump to cancel today's rally, model safe behavior as COVID-19 cases surge

Posted on Monday, Oct 26, 2020

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LA CROSSE, Wis. — Wisconsin physicians today submitted a [letter](#) calling on President Trump to cancel all Wisconsin campaign rallies, including a campaign rally on Tuesday — his third in the state in 10 days — as COVID-19 ravages Wisconsin, data links his rallies to outbreaks and state Republicans continue blocking public safety measures. Last week was Wisconsin's [deadliest](#), and Wisconsin's seven-day average [positivity rate](#) was more than 22 times the rate in New York City, whose 1-percent rate is already considered risky.

The physicians also pushed back against medically inaccurate information that Trump has promoted recently, including in Wisconsin on Saturday.

“As a physician who lives and works in the La Crosse area, I am extremely concerned that President Trump’s rallies will infect people in my community, cause uncontrolled spread and worsen the pain and suffering we already see across Wisconsin,” said Dr. Robert Freedland, Wisconsin State Lead for the Committee to Protect Medicare and an ophthalmologist in La Crosse. “Physicians across Wisconsin have repeatedly begged President Trump to cancel his campaign rallies, and at least one event in Marathon County led to a massive spike in cases, so repeating a reckless, risky event like a packed campaign rally is just asking for trouble. As physicians, we ask President Trump to put public health ahead of politics, prioritize people’s safety and stay away from Wisconsin.”

New [data](#) analysis has linked regional outbreaks to Trump’s campaign rallies. Cases

went up two weeks after Trump held rallies in Marathon County, Wis., which saw a 50-percent spike; Bemidji, Minn., which saw a 24-percent spike; Mankato, Minn., where cases rose 9 percent; Lackawanna, Penn., which saw a 4.6-percent increase; and Harrisburg, Penn., where cases went up 3.5 percent.

Trump held those rallies despite multiple warnings from [public health experts](#), including from his own White House COVID-19 task force before an Oct. 17 rally in Janesville, Wis. Trump's COVID-19 team warned residents to practice "mask wearing, physical distancing, hand hygiene, [avoiding crowds in public](#) and social gatherings in private." Failure to comply, Trump's task force warned, "will lead to preventable deaths."

"Again and again, physicians in Wisconsin have asked President Trump to show leadership in this pandemic and we are still waiting," said Dr. Ann Helms, MD, neurologist in Milwaukee. "For months, health professionals across Wisconsin asked for masks, tests and resources to protect people and we need those now more than ever as COVID-19 slams our state. Wisconsin is asking President Trump to step up and lead by example — including modeling safety behaviors that's based on evidence and telling politicians in his party to stop obstructing basic pandemic preventative measures. People in Wisconsin are sick and dying, and we have no time for President Trump's politics as usual."

On Saturday, Wisconsin reported [4,062 new cases](#) of the disease, bringing the average for the past seven days to 4,050 daily cases — the [highest](#) since the pandemic began. Daily new cases have been rising since early September, when the average was below 700. More than 1,700 people in Wisconsin have [died](#), with 190,000 individuals infected. The U.S. death toll on Sunday was 225,000, with 8.6 million people infected.

Republican legislators and conservative groups have launched at least three legal challenges to Gov. Tony Evers' ability to implement public health directives during a pandemic. On Friday, a three-judge panel [blocked](#) Evers from enforcing an order that [caps capacity](#) at bars and other businesses at 25 percent as a way to maximize social distancing and slow the spread of COVID-19. Earlier, a separate [lawsuit](#) was filed to overturn Evers' order requiring people to wear masks in public. Evers' authority to implement his statewide "Safer at Home" order in spring was upheld in a third legal challenge.

Because of legal and political challenges to Evers' public safety measures,

Wisconsin has no restrictions on gatherings, businesses or schools, yet Trump said at his Janesville [rally](#): “I wish you had a Republican governor because, frankly, you’ve got to open your state up. You’ve got to open it up.”

“From a medical and health perspective, President Trump is making things worse for Wisconsin,” said Dr. Robert Freedland. “The last thing Wisconsin should do is open up because that’s asking us to pour gasoline on ourselves when COVID-19 is burning our house down. The last thing President Trump should be doing now is sabotaging health workers, whether he’s forcing us to reuse protective equipment because he refused to give us enough masks or accusing us of inflating COVID-19 deaths for more money. Had President Trump done his job and helped health workers do ours, tens of thousands of people would [still be alive](#) today.”

On Friday, a new [analysis](#) showed that Trump’s poor pandemic response likely led to 130,000 additional deaths — and as many as 210,000 — that could have been prevented.

On Saturday in Waukesha, Trump [falsely claimed](#) that hospitals and medical professionals have a financial incentive to list COVID-19 as a cause of death and said — [wrongly](#) — that comorbidities such as heart and lung diseases should be cited as the sole cause of death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Mortality Statistic Branch says causes and conditions that begin the chain of events leading to an individual’s death, such as COVID-19, is considered that individual’s underlying cause of death. Additionally, Congress and the president set hospitals’ reimbursement funds.

At the final presidential [debate](#) on Thursday, Trump repeated a medically inaccurate statement he has made several times when he claimed the nation was “rounding the corner” on the pandemic. Trump has repeatedly downplayed COVID-19’s devastation when he characterizes the endemic as “[disappearing](#).” On Friday, the United States saw the [highest number](#) of new COVID-19 cases ever, at 85,000 infections, just one day after seeing more than 75,000 new infections, the most since July 16.

READ THE FULL LETTER BELOW:

Dear Donald J. Trump for President campaign:

As physicians, we are extremely concerned about President Trump's decision to continue to hold irresponsible campaign rallies in our state as COVID-19 cases continue to rise.

We are concerned about the rally itself, which packs people close together with no physical-distancing or widespread mask wearing, as well as the public statements and disinformation President Trump continues to share. We believe the rallies, and President Trump's rhetoric, increase risks to people's health and safety.

His visits also come as all but 4 counties in Wisconsin are experiencing [very high levels](#) of COVID-19 cases and spread. On Wednesday, 10/21, our state recorded a record-high [48 coronavirus deaths](#). Last week, a [field hospital](#) admitted its first patient as hospitals' capacity to treat patients is dwindling. Data also suggests that communities have experienced [marked increases](#) in COVID-19 cases in the wake of President Trump's super-spreader events.

For these reasons, we call on your campaign to cancel all rallies in Wisconsin for the remainder of the presidential campaign.

We additionally ask that President Trump and his associates stop intentionally spreading medically inaccurate information through their many communications platforms. Just a few recent examples include:

- At last week's rally in [Wisconsin](#), President Trump claimed that the nation was "rounding the corner" in the COVID-19 pandemic effort — one day after Wisconsin reported 4,000 new COVID-19 cases, with record numbers of cases in preceding days. That day, the [death toll](#) reached 215,000, with 8.1 million Americans sickened. He repeated this lie at his second debate on Thursday.
- In Thursday's debate, President Trump [claimed](#) COVID-19 [mortality](#) rates are

down 85 percent and that a [vaccine](#) is ready — both untrue, and only give people a false sense of security.

- President Trump falsely said multiple times that wearing [masks increases](#) the risk of COVID-19, when the scientific evidence clearly shows that masks can [reduce](#) person-to-person [transmissions](#) and mitigate [community infection](#) rates.
- After leaving Walter Reed Medical Center on Oct. 5, President Trump claimed he was “[immune](#)” following treatment for COVID-19. He later tweeted “I can’t get it (immune), and can’t give it” — a statement [Twitter](#) had to take down because the president spread what Twitter called “misleading and potentially harmful information related to COVID-19.” He repeated his claim about being immune at Thursday’s debate.
- President Trump called [experimental antiviral drugs](#) he received “cures” in a Twitter video, and falsely said that the therapy had been authorized, with hundreds of thousands of doses ready for use.

For these reasons, in the interest of public health and safety, we ask President Trump to cancel all rallies in Wisconsin for the remainder of the campaign. If the President does not cancel his potential superspreader events, we urge people to avoid attending the rally.

The best precaution people can take is to continue to take the pandemic seriously and to practice preventative measures that can reduce the likelihood of transmission. President Trump’s rallies increase the risk of COVID-19 person-to-person infections, and they give a false impression that COVID-19 is no longer with us.

When nearly 1,000 Americans continue to die every day from COVID-19, the data shows this pandemic is still with us. COVID-19 has not gone away no matter how many times President Trump tells people to “learn to live” with it.

We can keep each other safer and truly turn the corner by wearing a mask, washing your hands and avoiding large crowds. That means choosing to stay home and stay

safer. No presidential candidate should be holding large, in-person events that ignore proper social-distancing guidelines, especially if the candidate encourages behavior that threatens the health of our patients.

Wisconsinites cannot afford the public health threat posed by President Trump's super-spreader campaign rallies.

Signed:

Robert Freedland, MD; Ophthalmologist & State Lead for the Committee to Protect Medicare (La Crosse)

Manohar Ahuja, MD; Nephrologist (Brookfield)

Brittany Allen, MD; Pediatrics (Madison)

Rebecca Beach, MD; Family medicine (Richland center)

Joseph Budovec, MD; Radiology (Brookfield)

Karen Carlson, MD, PhD; Hematology/Oncology (Elm Grove)

Karen Chao, MD; Pediatrician (Milwaukee)

Richard Harbecke, MD; Pulmonologist (Mequon)

Alexandra Harrington, MD; Pathology (Franklin)

Ann Helms, MD; Neurology (Brookfield)

William Hocking, MD; Oncology-Hematology (Marshfield)

Thomas Hunt, MD; Family Medicine (Eau Claire)

Bhupendra Khatri, MD; Neurologist (Milwaukee)

Jonathan Kohler, MD; Surgery (Madison)

Jeffrey Kushner, MD; Cardiology (Verona)

Laurel Mark, MD; Internal Medicine (Madison)

Kristi Maso, MD; Critical care (Milwaukee)

Gabriel Mihailescu, MD; Internal Medicine (Brussels)

Jonathan Rubin, MD; Emergency Medicine (Mequon)

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Madelaine Tully, MD; Family Medicine (Milwaukee)

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