

Dept. of Health Services: Increases contact tracing capabilities

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Today the Department of Health Services (DHS) announced new tracing mechanisms for local health departments to better track Wisconsin residents who may have been exposed to COVID-19 during Tuesday's election.

Over the course of the last few weeks DHS has added more than 120 contact tracers to aid local public health departments who need additional capacity to interview every person confirmed with COVID-19 about anyone they had been in contact with and notify those people. Contact tracing staff have worked to follow up on more than 1,000 interviews to identify and notify contacts for Milwaukee Health Department alone. Additionally, Governor Evers has requested \$17 million in new funds for local public health agencies, and 64 additional staff at DHS in his proposed legislative package, to adequately respond to the public health needs in Wisconsin. These proposed contact tracing assets will be critical to Wisconsin's ability to actively manage this pandemic until effective medical treatment or a vaccine is available.

"Contact tracing is a critical tool in our ability to effectively manage COVID-19 now and moving forward," said DHS Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. "We will continue this important work to ensure that every case is followed up on, contacted, and anyone who may have been exposed notified. We hope the extraordinary efforts taken by local clerks, public health, voters, and poll workers helped minimize any transmission but we stand prepared to respond if that isn't the case."

Despite efforts to protect the public by moving to postpone in-person voting on April 7, the Supreme Court ruled against that request and the elections were held on Tuesday. The Wisconsin Elections Commission provided municipal and county clerks with personal protective equipment and guidance that was developed in

consultation with public health staff to prepare polling places, poll workers, and voters for Election Day to ensure that if the elections were held people could cast their vote in the safest manner possible. However, even with the safeguards polling places and workers put in place, there is some risk that people were exposed to COVID-19 while waiting to vote, casting their vote, or working the polls.

DHS and local public health officials are monitoring this situation and expect to see any cases from exposure on April 7 begin to appear next week. People who are positive for COVID-19 are interviewed by local public health officials about exposures, which includes possible exposures at the polls. This information will allow our surveillance epidemiologists the opportunity to identify if the election had any impact on the spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin; however, DHS will not have a full picture of the impact for several weeks as it does take some time for people to develop symptoms, (and symptoms may develop sooner or later for different people), talk to a health care provider about testing, get tested, get the results, and be interviewed by a local public health contact tracer.