

Evers administration places new restrictions on indoor public gatherings to fight COVID

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Gov. Tony Evers' administration issued a new order today limiting indoor public gatherings to 25 percent of a room's capacity, placing new restrictions on bars, restaurants and other private businesses as the state has become one of the nation's hotspots for COVID-19 cases.

The order, issued by DHS Secretary Andrea Palm, takes effect at 8 a.m. Thursday and will remain effect through Nov. 6.

It applies to any gathering at locations open to the public, including ticketed events. But that doesn't impact schools, office spaces, factories and other workplaces that are only accessible by employees or authorized personnel.

Evers said the order was part of an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 and help hospitals that are now overwhelmed with cases.

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"We're in a crisis right now and need to immediately change our behavior to save lives," he said.

The order relies on occupancy limits established by local governments. For those spaces that haven't been rated by local governments, the order places a cap of 10 people on gatherings. Enforcement will also be left to local officials, though many have refused to enforce the mask mandate Evers first issued this summer. Penalties for violations include a civil forfeiture.

The exempt list also includes: local governments, religious services, political events,

or invitation-only events. It also will not impact polling sites Nov. 3.

Private residences are exempt unless they host an event open to anyone.

The order comes after the state Supreme Court in May struck down a stay-at-home order that Palm had issued. The conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty is also currently challenging the gov's latest public health emergency declaration that was the foundation for the second mask mandate he issued.

Evers' Chief Legal Counsel Ryan Nilsestuen said today's order was issued under authority provided to Palm that wasn't impacted by the May Supreme Court decision. He also called it one of the few options the gov has left after that decision.

Still, he expects a legal challenge, saying there have been only two certainties of 2020, one of them being Republicans' refusal to convene the Legislature.

"Two, they're going to sue any chance they get," Nilsestuen said on a call briefing reporters on the order.

Wisconsin is third in the country for the new number of cases in the past seven days, behind only California and Texas, according to DHS. It also trails only the Dakotas for new cases per 100,000 residents.

DHS today reported 2,020 new cases of COVID-19 and 18 deaths. The state's seven-day average of daily new cases is 2,346, up from 836 a month ago.

Forty-five of the state's 72 counties met the threshold for "very high" disease activity with the rest in the "high" category.

Read the [order](#).

See the [release](#).