

Gov. Evers: Directs DHS to limit gatherings to less than 10 to slow spread of COVID-19

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 17, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today directed Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Andrea Palm to issue an agency order prohibiting mass gatherings of 10 people or more to slow the spread of COVID-19. The order makes exceptions for transportation, educational institutions, child care, hotels, military, law enforcement, food pantries, hospitals, long-term care facilities, restaurants and bars can only offer take-out or delivery, grocery stores and convenience stores, utility facilities, job centers, and courts. See full order and list of exemptions [here](#). Additionally, schools will be closed for the duration of the public health emergency.

“Our top priority at this time is to keep Wisconsinites safe and healthy by reducing the spread of COVID-19, especially for those who are considered high-risk. With limited tests available nationwide and continued community spread, we have to take every precaution to protect ourselves, our families, and our neighbors,” said Gov. Evers. “I know what this means for our small business owners and the struggles they and their workers will face in the coming weeks, but we are committed to working with our federal partners, state officials, and stakeholders to ensure we are doing everything we can to assist during these uncertain times.”

Community Spread

We are seeing community spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin. This means that there are people who have tested positive who have no exposures to a known case nor did they travel to a location where there is known community spread. Today, we have cases in Milwaukee, Dane and Kenosha counties indicating that there is community spread happening in Wisconsin. Social distancing will help keep you, your family, and our community from increased risk of exposure.

DHS and Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene to move to tiered COVID-19 testing to manage capacity

Despite The Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) significantly increasing their capacity for COVID-19 testing, the number of testing specimens being received far exceeds their daily capacity. In order to conserve supplies for testing, WSLH and DHS are now prioritizing two tiers of cases for testing:

Tier One (Individuals who):

- are critically ill and receiving ICU level care with unexplained viral pneumonia or respiratory failure
- are hospitalized (non-ICU) with fever or signs and symptoms of lower respiratory tract illness (cough, shortness of breath) and either known exposure to a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient or travel to an area with sustained community transmission

Tier Two (Individuals who):

- are hospitalized (non-ICU) with unexplained fever and signs/symptoms of lower respiratory tract illness
- are health care workers with unexplained fever and signs/symptoms of a lower-respiratory illness, regardless of hospitalization

Test requests that do not meet these criteria will be sent to other labs in the state and country for testing, resulting in longer wait times.

Information for healthcare providers on the testing tiers is available at dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm. Patients without symptoms and patients with mild upper respiratory symptoms who are not health care workers should not be tested in order to ensure that there is capacity to test ill people.

People should follow simple steps to prevent illness and avoid exposure to this virus including:

- Avoid social gatherings with people of all ages (including playdates and sleepovers, parties, large family dinners, visitors in your home, non-essential workers in your house);
- Frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water;
- Covering coughs and sneezes;

- Avoiding touching your face;
- Staying home when sick.

This is a rapidly evolving situation and we encourage you and the public to frequently monitor the [DHS website for updates](#), and to follow @DHSWI on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), or dhs.wi on [Instagram](#). Additional information can be found on the [CDC website](#).