

Hospital group urges Capitol leaders to cooperate on new COVID-19 mitigation strategy

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The Wisconsin Hospital Association urged Gov. Tony Evers and legislative leaders to cooperate and quickly implement a new mitigation strategy to slow COVID-19 spread.

Evers and top Republicans are set to meet today.

WHA President Eric Borgerding suggested yesterday Evers and lawmakers consider a statewide mask policy and taking steps to affirm the authority of local governments to adopt their own restrictions. He also wrote a “chief priority” is addressing capacity issues at state hospitals, including the creation of more alternate care facilities.

Borgerding’s push comes amid a series of legal setbacks for the gov on the various steps his administration has taken to address the pandemic. Evers is also poised to extend his mask mandate into mid-January even as the state Supreme Court has been asked to strike down the existing order.

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“Community spread of COVID-19 is the clear root cause of the crisis now gripping Wisconsin and striving for common ground and unified action to slow it down must be our top and immediate priority,” Borgerding urged.

An Evers spokeswoman said the gov was scheduled to meet today with Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, and incoming Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, R-Oostburg.

Earlier this week, Evers sent the GOP leaders and their aides legislation to address COVID-19, and his staff had suggested a Friday meeting.

An Evers spokeswoman pointed to the gov's statewide speech last week calling on citizens to take more steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and calling for additional measures in saying the gov supports the WHA's call.

Vos said in a statement the issues the WHA raised don't come as a surprise because he and his colleagues are in regular contact with the group and local hospitals.

"I agree with the Wisconsin Hospital Association that more must be done to slow the spread of the coronavirus," Vos said. "Wisconsin needs more COVID testing, contact tracers and other solutions to help ease the strain on our healthcare facilities, decrease the rate of transmission and ultimately save lives."

Borgerding also detailed the stress placed on the state's hospitals by uncontrolled COVID-19 spread.

The latest WHA coronavirus update shows COVID-19 hospitalizations in Wisconsin at 2,217 patients.

The total number of patients is down from the WHA's last count, which was a record at 2,277. Of those hospitalized, 428 are in intensive care, which is three fewer than the previous record report.

The Alternate Care Facility at State Fair Park is treating 17 coronavirus patients — five fewer than Wednesday. The West Allis field hospital, an overflow facility for hospitals statewide, has a capacity of over 500 patients.

"With few tools available right now to curb spread other than increasingly urgent public appeals, our COVID numbers are growing rapidly and predict, quite accurately so far, a health care crisis in Wisconsin that without significant, swift, and unified action will become a catastrophe," Borgerding wrote in yesterday's letter. "This is hard to fathom for many across the state, but for those fighting this ever-growing battle in our hospitals, the data simply illustrate the human tragedy playing out in front of them every day."

He called on both Dem and GOP state leaders to:

- *address the state's urgent health care workforce shortage;
- *provide critically needed financial and human resources to hospitals;

- *maintain and expand testing capacity and contact tracing;
- *and streamline Medicaid regulations that can pose a barrier to care.

“A crisis of this magnitude caused by a virus that is so clearly raging across all of Wisconsin demands a unified and substantial response,” Borgerding wrote. “Your joint leadership is critical to improve this situation, allowing everyone to get back to our way of life sooner.”

Read the letter:

http://www.wha.org/WHAletter-Elected-Leaders_COVID-11-18-20

Listen to a recent WisBusiness.com podcast with Borgerding:

<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2020/wisbusiness-the-podcast-with-eric-borgerding--wisconsin-hospital-association-2/>