

Mayor Rhodes-Conway: Data and science will guide our decision making

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Last evening, I was pleased to join Public Health Madison & Dane County (PHMDC) Director Janel Heinrich and Dane County Executive Joe Parisi as a new countywide public health order was issued to protect the health and safety of residents.

The need to issue the order was maddening, but perhaps predictable. The State Supreme Court ruling struck down the statewide Safer at Home without any plan or safety net for our residents. As County Executive Parisi noted, the order created chaos and confusion statewide. The court ruled that the Department of Health Services acted unlawfully, but then suggested they had the authority to keep schools closed in a footnote. Businesses restaurants and bars didn't know whether to open or close. Some bars opened in areas where cases are rapidly increasing – a recipe for disaster.

Our Public Health Madison & Dane County Order essentially mirrors the guidance of statewide Safer At Home and it is imperative that everyone follow this order for now. The court completely undermined the authority of the state public health department but did not attack the authority of local public health officials.

We have seen that Safer at Home is working in Dane County and is slowing the spread of COVID-19. Continuing public health orders at a local level will ensure that we don't go backwards on all the progress we have made.

As Public Health Director Janel Heinrich stated last evening, "Like everyone else, we are eager to reopen businesses and work towards normalcy, but we need to do this

slowly and based on the data.”

Data for Dane County looks promising, but as Janel pointed out, we don't know where 25% of confirmed cases here in Dane County are coming from. This indicates that the virus is still circulating in our community.

That is why just this week, Madison in partnership with the county, the state and National Guard, opened its first, free mass testing clinic at the Alliant Energy Center. The mass testing will give us some of the data we need to know about the prevalence of community spread.

Testing may result in finding many more who are sick. These cases will need contact tracing, isolation and support. That is another reason why we extended our public health order until May 26th .

Many hundreds of area residents have already been tested. Combined with increased testing in the private sector, we will soon have a better picture to guide us in decision-making and allow us to make progress towards a re-opening strategy that is right for Dane County.

Here in Dane County, we had 491 cases, 22 deaths. That is 22 too many, but we are keeping the number lower than other parts of the state and of course other parts of the country. It is worth remembering that until we get a vaccine (projected to be a year to 18 months from now); we are still in the early days of this pandemic. As we dial back restrictions, we will have to do it in such a way that new waves of illness will not overwhelm our health care partners.

Please continue to stay home as much as you can. If you must go out, wear a face covering and stay 6 feet away from others. Do not host groups, gatherings, and playdates. Continuing strong everyday prevention measures. Wash your hands often and cover your sneezes and coughs with a tissue or your elbow. It takes all of us to keep our community safe, and I thank you for everything you are doing.