

Patty Schachtner: We are safer at home

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Social distancing is a little easier when your nearest neighbor is a mile down the road and there are fewer community centers or public playgrounds for all of us to easily congregate. But rural Wisconsin communities like ours are not immune from the spread of coronavirus.

Andy Pekosz, a professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health argues that it's just a matter of time before folks in rural areas begin to contract the coronavirus. The good news is that we have more time to prepare- but that time is waning. We have the privilege to "flatten the curve" with more efficiency than the parts of this state that didn't have enough warning to do so.

Our state's Safer at Home order is meant to keep each Wisconsinite in every community of this state safe and healthy, and it may in fact be the most successful in rural areas. As I'm writing this, Polk and Burnett Counties have not discovered any positive coronavirus cases yet. But St. Croix, Dunn, and Pierce Counties all have several. Meanwhile, of all the counties in this district, only one has any ICU beds at all- Polk County. And they only have three. Frankly, that won't be enough if the spread continues unabated.

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For a virus with no standard treatment and no vaccine, our best defense lies outside of the healthcare system. It lies with us. It is our responsibility now to limit our exposure to other people outside of our families. Our front line healthcare workers

need all of us to step up and do our part for our community and our state.

I've spent years as a CNA, EMT, and death investigator. I am one of those front line workers. Nurses, doctors, EMS teams, and each county's medical examiner have all been preparing for this pandemic while hoping that it never comes to our communities. While we have emergency plans in place, we need your participation to be successful. If we all work together to stay apart, we can keep our ICU beds from running out of space and ensure that there are also enough ventilators available for every patient that needs one.

You can still go outside to play with your family, take a bike ride on a state trail, or volunteer if you don't have underlying health issues. I've joined Ruby's Pantry for their food share distribution the past two weekends and we've been able to get food to hundreds of families while staying 6 feet apart and practicing good hygiene! If you're healthy and able, you could also get out and donate blood with the American Red Cross.

There are plenty of opportunities to do your part, but the most important thing you can do right now is simply maintain your distance from other people as much as you can. While we can't stop this virus in its tracks, we can slow it down and we have to.

- Schachtner, D-Somerset, represents Wisconsin's 10th Senate District.