

# Public Health Madison & Dane County: Moving to crisis model of contact tracing with surge in COVID-19 cases

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As more and more people are diagnosed with COVID-19 in Dane County, Public Health Madison & Dane County is no longer able to efficiently follow-up with everyone who has been diagnosed. Public Health is moving to a crisis model of contact tracing.

“Like all other health departments in the state, we are struggling to keep up with contact tracing. When we consistently have well over 150 new cases per day, we cannot contact all cases and contacts quickly enough to effectively disrupt the spread of COVID-19,” said Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County. “We are moving to a crisis model of contact tracing.”

With a crisis model of contact tracing, if a person tests positive, they will still be notified of the positive test by their health care provider or testing center, and given isolation instructions. Unfortunately, a Public Health contact tracer may not be able to follow up with all people to support isolation. Public Health will prioritize contacting individuals with a positive diagnosis before providing contact tracing, a tool that can help prevent spread.

Public Health asks that people who test positive for COVID-19 notify their close contacts that they have been exposed. The Public Health [website has guidelines](#) on what you should do if you are sick or were possibly exposed.

“Our community has crossed a threshold with COVID-19 and sadly we have reached a place where if you venture out and come into contact with someone with this virus, it may take a while for you and your family to be notified,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. “In the face of understandable exhaustion and unprecedented difficulty we have to press on like our health, lives, and those of others depend on it – because they do. Each one of us has to review our daily routines and do all we can to distance and minimize contact with others,” Parisi added.

Should case counts decline, Public Health may be able to resume contact tracing. But we do not know when case counts will fall—it all depends on the community’s collective actions.

“We all have the ability to be leaders during this pandemic,” said City of Madison Mayor Rhodes-Conway. “[As an individual](#), you can be a leader in your community by staying home as much as possible and taking precautions if you must go out. As a business owner, you can be a leader by ensuring your staff and customers are following all of Public Health’s [requirements and recommendations](#). As a workplace supervisor, you can be a leader by using remote and virtual options to the fullest extent possible.”

In addition to cases exceeding contact tracing capacity in the county, Dane County hospitalizations for COVID-19 are at high levels. As of October 21, there are 90 people hospitalized with COVID-19 and 22 in the ICU.

“While we’re in a much better place to handle a surge in COVID-19 cases now, any influx in patients is challenging,” said Dr. Pam Wetzel, Chief Medical Officer at UnityPoint Health – Meriter. “Our hospitals continue to make changes and evolve so we can safely meet the healthcare needs of our community.”

“All of our hospitals and clinics are prepared and ready to care for the community. As cases continue to rise, we are continually monitoring our staffing to ensure we can care for every patient who enters our facilities,” said Kyle Nondorf, SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital – Madison President. “We urge every resident to follow Public Health Madison & Dane County’s recommendations: wear a mask, stay socially distanced and wash your hands. Further spread of COVID-19 could impact staffing

levels, putting additional strain on our health care systems.”

Public Health reminds people in our community to stay home as much as possible, including working remotely if possible. If you go outside your home, stay six feet from others. Wear your mask. Don't hang out in big groups. Don't go to events like weddings or parties. If you feel at all sick, stay home from work and activities and [get tested](#). If you do these things, you will greatly lower your chances of being exposed to COVID-19. If you are exposed to COVID-19, you will greatly lower the chances of spreading it further in our community.

Visit the Public Health website for more precautions for individuals, families, businesses, and other workplaces: [publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus](https://publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus).