

Westergaard on 'UpFront' says Wisconsin seeing 'generalized community spread' of COVID-19

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Wisconsin is now seeing “generalized community spread” of COVID-19 with local hot spots developing, said Dr. Ryan Westergaard, chief medical officer and state epidemiologist for communicable diseases in the Department of Health Services.

“There’s a slow burn that’s heating up in many areas of the state,” Westergaard told “UpFront,” produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

“We’re really seeing now generalized community spread and people becoming infected in communities that don’t really have a specific risk factor or exposed to a specific person who had symptoms,” he said.

Westergaard also said there is a “strong uptick” in COVID-19 cases in young adults, adolescents and children.

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He said mask mandates, recommendations and advisories can help slow the spread of the virus.

“The science is pretty clear that if we can really scale up how many people are wearing masks, we could expect it to have a pretty significant decrease on the number, the amount of transmission in communities,” he said.

“Masks have really emerged as one of our most important tools, and the closer we can get to, say, 90 percent or higher in public places, I think we could really see a big difference,” Westergaard said.

Also on the program, the new executive director of the Milwaukee Election Commission said the city will have 170 polling places open for the Aug. 11 and Nov. 3 elections.

Claire Woodall-Vogg said the commission is now recruiting volunteers to work as poll workers.

In the April election, Milwaukee had just a handful of polling places open during the statewide COVID-19 shutdown, resulting in long lines and frustrated voters who waited hours to cast a ballot.

Woodall-Vogg said the city is still encouraging people to vote absentee in August and November due to the ongoing spread of coronavirus.

“The safest way to vote is still going to be by absentee ballot, by mail, this fall,” she said.

Woodall-Vogg said the commission has already sent out around 61,000 absentee ballots for the August primary. She said that number normally is around 58,000 by this time ahead of an August primary.

In another segment, Dr. Keith Posley, superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools, discussed the district’s phased-in approach to starting the new school year during coronavirus.

MPS will begin the first phase with virtual learning, transitioning to a combination of virtual learning and classroom instruction in phase two, and finally moving to in-person instruction five days a week in phase three.

“UpFront” host Adrienne Pedersen asked Posley how the district would make sure that students are not behind when they eventually return to classrooms.

“We have laid out a robust schedule for teachers and staff to follow,” Posley said. “We have also looked at what we need to do around making sure that we have the summer slide, and then you could even say spring slide, but what do we need to do to make sure we meet our students where they are.”

See more from the program [here](#).