

# Better data would not have changed nursing home strategy, Evers says

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 23, 2021

Gov. Tony Evers says better data on COVID-19 infections and deaths in nursing homes would not have changed precautions or vaccine rollout plans.

The Evers administration has been facing GOP criticism for a lag in accurately reporting COVID-19 infection and death numbers for nursing homes. The criticism comes after administration efforts to clean up past data took nearly 1,000 deaths that had been listed in the “unknown” location category and properly slotted them into the category for nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Evers on Monday said the delay in categorizing those deaths did not affect plans to fight the pandemic because nursing homes with high infection and death rates already had high numbers of health care workers before the data clean-up effort.

GOP lawmakers have called for an audit of the state’s handling of COVID-19 cases in nursing homes.

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“If the Republicans want to weaponize the Legislative Audit Bureau, no surprise there. But at the end of the day it did not impact our outreach and our work with those nursing homes,” Evers said during a press conference at UW-Milwaukee. Evers toured a COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Milwaukee campus and signed a bill allowing dentists to administer COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots under certain circumstances.

The discussion over nursing home numbers comes as DHS has begun ramping up data quality assurance efforts in the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System. The effort includes reducing “unknowns” in the COVID-19 chart detailing deaths among those in different types of housing. They did this by matching

addresses to long-term care facilities or other group housing.

The process has added nearly 1,000 COVID-19 deaths to the long-term care facility category, which now accounts for 45 percent of the state's coronavirus deaths. Meanwhile, the percent of deaths where the group housing setting was unknown decreased from 46 percent to 26 percent.

State health officials said in a briefing Thursday they don't expect the 26 percent to be further reduced unless DHS thinks of another "creative idea" to match for housing.

Senate Health Committee Chair Pat Testin, R-Stevens Point, on Monday [demanded an explanation](#) for why the state's nursing home COVID-19 numbers are still wrong, adding the state's reporting on those numbers has been misleading since the start of the pandemic.

"Other states have managed to keep and report accurate, timely data, but a year into the pandemic, Evers' DHS is still not there," Testin said. "We need to understand why DHS is taking so long to provide accurate information and whether this lack of transparency is intentional or simply incompetence."

Listen to Monday's [Midday podcast](#) for more.

The state's five GOP House members sent [a letter to Evers](#) raising concerns the "failure to accurately classify these deaths obscured the truly dire situation in Wisconsin's long-term care facilities."

The five wrote the numbers — along with what they said were delays in vaccinating those in assisted living facilities — prompted concerns "that Wisconsin's reputation as a leader in COVID19 vaccine distribution has been diminished."

Republicans were harshly critical of the Evers administration's early rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. But the state has gone from one of the worst in the nation to one of the best.

Evers tweeted Wisconsin "continues to be #1 in the country for getting available #COVID19 vaccine shots in arms. As of this weekend, more than 1 in 4 Wisconsinites—nearly 1.5 million people—have received at least one dose. As eligibility expands even further today, it's only upward from here!"

While in Milwaukee, Evers signed SB 13, which allows dentists to administer COVID-19 and flu vaccines under certain circumstances.

Among other requirements, dentists would have to complete an eight-hour course on vaccine storage, administration techniques and record keeping.

[See the release.](#)