

UW Health: Says isolation is critical for those with symptoms amid lack of testing availability

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MADISON, Wis. – Have symptoms of COVID-19 and can't get a COVID-19 test? You're not alone.

Around the state and nation, testing for COVID-19 is in incredibly high demand as records are being set daily for the number of cases. In Wisconsin last week, the state had more than 12,000 cases in one day for the first time in the pandemic, now in its third calendar year.

Social media was abuzz recently with images of miles-long lines of cars carrying people waiting to get in for testing, and stores are commonly sold out of at-home rapid tests. This reflects a stark reality for many – they have symptoms and can't get in for a test or find a test to confirm if they are sick with COVID-19 or something else.

If you are waiting for a test, the best thing you can do is isolate as if you have COVID-19, according to Dr. Jeff Pothof, chief quality officer, UW Health, and associate professor of emergency medicine, UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

"It's disheartening to be in this place where so many people are sick and there aren't enough tests to keep up, but we can't just pretend we aren't sick, infect others, and carry on with our lives," he said.

The demand is so great that patients are showing up to hospital emergency rooms looking for testing, Pothof said.

“The emergency department is already overwhelmed with the number of people seeking care, staffing is stretched thin and you risk infecting vulnerable people seeking care for other medical conditions who are at risk of severe disease or death from COVID-19,” he said. “If you are sick with mild or light symptoms, the best thing you can do is stay home and isolate while you wait for a test to become available.”

People should stay at home, rest, drink plenty of fluids and avoid public areas and public transportation, according the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When isolating at home, if you live with others, try to stay in one room by yourself, avoid being around others in your household including pets, and monitor your symptoms closely, the CDC guidance states. If symptoms worsen, consult your care provider and take appropriate action at that time.

“Many cases of COVID-19 are mild to moderate and can be treated at home, so if you have symptoms and can’t find a test, assume you are positive and take the appropriate action,” Pothof said.

While testing is in high demand it is still important to try to get tested. To find a test in your area, visit the Department of Health Services testing [webpage](#). If you have symptoms but a rapid test comes back negative, it is still important to seek a more sensitive PCR test before resuming normal activities.