

COVID-19 BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW

COVID-19 is a virus that has not previously infected humans and information about its rate of spread and its effects is still largely unknown, which makes it incredibly important to be highly cautious in dealing with the current situation. Here's an update on the work done so far, the current status of COVID-19 in Wisconsin, and the steps being taken to keep families and communities safe. The information herein is current as of this morning on March 12, 2020, but please know that as this is a rapidly evolving situation; there will continue to be updates and changes.

Please continue to find the most current information on the [DHS website](#), which has guidance that is updated regularly for travel, self-quarantine, and school districts, among other important information.

As of this morning, March 12, there have been six people who tested positive for COVID-19 in Wisconsin. One of the six has already recovered. Gov. Evers, the Department of Health Services (DHS), and the State agencies are taking this issue very seriously and precautions are being taken across Wisconsin. Gov. Evers, his administration, and staff have also been working with partners at the local and federal levels to provide the most accurate, up-to-date information as possible.

ACTIONS THUS FAR

Earlier this month, Gov. Evers directed the DHS to provide the public and legislators from across the state an informational briefing and to give an update on the status of COVID-19. Over the past few weeks, the DHS has also hosted regular informational calls to provide updates to members of the media so we can ensure folks across our state are receiving the most current information we have available. Gov. Evers has also participated in discussions with Vice President Mike Pence and senior administration officials to receive updates on the White House Coronavirus Task Force and to share how Wisconsin and other states are responding to COVID-19. Addressing public health issues like COVID-19 requires collaboration and communication to ensure efforts are efficient and effective. Members of Gov. Evers' administration have been in regular contact with other elected officials and partners at the local, state, and federal levels, and are continuing to work together on preventing and responding to COVID-19.

Making sure that folks have access to the healthcare resources, care, and treatment they need is critically important in working to manage the spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin. On March 6, Gov. Evers and Insurance Commissioner Mark Afable asked health plan issuers to help Wisconsinites access testing and treatment for COVID-19 and to ensure that healthcare is as accessible as possible as we continue to monitor this situation.

Gov. Evers and Commissioner Afable requested that health plan issuers waive cost-sharing for COVID-19-related laboratory testing and radiology services, prepare for increased demand for telehealth services, review readiness and responsiveness plans to new COVID-19 cases, and that health plan issuers cover the immunization for COVID-19—in the event that an immunization becomes available—at no cost-sharing for covered members. They also asked that health plan issuers be flexible on prescription drug supply limitations and early refill limitations so folks can get their medication as quickly as possible and without worrying about increased exposure or risk.

The governor and our office have also been working with U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin to help secure federal funding to support our efforts in responding to COVID-19 in Wisconsin. On March 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that Wisconsin will be receiving more than \$10.2 million to support our response and prevention efforts for COVID-19. Gov. Evers and his

administration are working quickly to determine how to best allocate these resources toward prevention and response across our state.

On March 11, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Also on March 11, state agency employees also received an update on COVID-19 in Wisconsin and its effects on our workforce. This morning, Gov. Evers signed Executive Order #72 declaring a public health emergency in Wisconsin and hosted a press conference giving an update to the people of Wisconsin about COVID-19. Executive Order #72 directs the DHS to take all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent and respond to incidents of COVID-19 in Wisconsin, and suspends any administrative rules that the DHS finds would increase the health threat or prevent, hinder, or delay our response to the COVID-19 emergency. It also directs the Adjutant General of the Wisconsin National Guard to assist in our response to the public health emergency. Additionally, the DHS also issued new guidance regarding mass gatherings, travel, and long-term care and assisted living facilities. Please see the DHS website for these updates.

Finally, in addition to those efforts, effective tomorrow, March 13, 2020, the Wisconsin State Capitol will be suspending all Capitol tours until further notice. Tour desk employees will complete the scheduled group tours today; however, public, unscheduled tours will end starting this afternoon today, March 12, 2020.

State agencies are continuing normal operations at this time. The governor's office, the Department of Administration, and the DHS continue to provide guidance for state employees and protecting the health and wellbeing of individuals who may be at a higher risk. Agencies are also continuing to review their continuity of operations plans to ensure that the business of the people of Wisconsin can continue.

NEXT STEPS

Gov. Evers, the DHS, and his administration are continuing to receive consistent updates on the status of COVID-19. Our office will continue sharing information as quickly as it becomes available and will be sure to make sure you are aware of any changes or updates to today's announcement. Please continue reaching out to our legislative team and the DHS legislative team with any questions.

Additionally, we ask for your assistance in helping us disseminate accurate, up-to-date information so our constituents and members of the public can make informed decisions and keep themselves, family members, and neighbors safe. A live video of Gov. Evers' press conference today is available on the governor's social media accounts. Please share this video widely so folks are aware of today's important update. Please also continue to share any public health or COVID-19 related content from the governor's and DHS' Facebook and Twitter accounts to ensure your constituents and members of the public continue to receive accurate and current information about the status of COVID-19 in Wisconsin.

Please continue to share information with members of the public on how to prevent illness or avoid exposure to this virus. In the case of COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently advises that common symptoms include flu-like symptoms (fever (100° F or higher), cough or sore throat, headache or body aches, and in some cases diarrhea and vomiting) or symptoms of respiratory illness (fever (100° F or higher), cough, and shortness of breath). In order to slow or stop the spread of these illnesses, it is critical to follow the below instructions, which is guidance from the CDC as of 3/11/2020.

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
 - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
 - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 (at home or in a health care setting).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
 - For information about handwashing, see CDC's Handwashing website.
 - For information specific to healthcare providers, see CDC's Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings.