



PRESS RELEASE

March 15, 2020

New Mass Gathering Guidance from CDC & Employee Wellness Checks

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As of Sunday, March 15 (5:00pm), there have been no reported cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Portage County. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has reported 33 confirmed cases in the state, and each case is being handled appropriately by local public health officials.

New guidance on mass gatherings from the CDC:

"Large events and mass gatherings can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in the United States via travelers who attend these events and introduce the virus to new communities. Examples of large events and mass gatherings include conferences, festivals, parades, concerts, sporting events, weddings, and other types of assemblies. These events can be planned not only by organizations and communities but also by individuals.

Therefore, CDC, in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings, recommends that for the next 8 weeks, organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States.

Events of any size should only be continued if they can be carried out with adherence to guidelines for protecting vulnerable populations, hand hygiene, and social distancing. When feasible, organizers could modify events to be virtual.

This recommendation does not apply to the day to day operation of organizations such as schools, institutes of higher learning, or businesses. This recommendation is made in an attempt to reduce introduction of the virus into new communities and to slow the spread of infection in communities already affected by the virus. This recommendation is not intended to supersede the advice of local public health officials."

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>

Due to the presence of at least six confirmed cases and based upon this new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Public Health Officer of Madison and Dane County has ordered a countywide moratorium on mass gatherings of 50 or more people in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The order is effective at 12:01am on Monday, March 16, 2020, and will continue until further notice or amended in writing by the Public Health Officer.

Portage County Division of Public Health has **not** ordered a similar moratorium at this time. However, county officials do strongly recommend that county residents follow the CDC's guidance above.

There have also been reports of employers requiring employees who are ill for any reason to go through a wellness check at medical facilities prior to returning to work. According to current CDC guidance, this is unnecessary and not recommended, as it is also placing an unnecessary burden on health care providers. Portage County Division of Public Health recommends that employers follow the CDC's recommended strategies for employers to use now, which includes the following:

"Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way."

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.

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