

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walworth County Public Health Department Temporarily Implements Crisis Standards of Practice for Contact Tracing

Health Officer Erica Bergstrom announced today that the Walworth County Public Health Department has implemented Crisis Standards of Practice in response to the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Walworth County.

During the past two weeks, nearly 600 new COVID-19 cases were reported to the Walworth County Public Health Department. This number has risen exponentially, nearly doubling over the previous two-week period. This increase has created an overwhelming number of cases and close contacts. Despite increased staffing, the number of people to be contacted has now exceeded the capacity of the Walworth County Public Health Department. "We are no longer able to conduct the same level of notification and contact tracing that we would during a typical outbreak. The pandemic has now reached a level in Walworth County that has required us to adapt our response. As suggested by Dr. Ryan Westergaard, Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases, we will begin to implement Crisis Standards of Practice to ensure we are protecting our most vulnerable," stated Bergstrom.

Neighboring counties, Jefferson and Rock began implementing Crisis Standards of Practice in early October. Laboratories have also experienced the effects of rising cases and are taking longer to notify Public Health of results, further extending contact timelines.

Effective starting October 30, 2020, Crisis Standards of Practice will prioritize contacting positive cases who are:

- Age 60 and older
- Children who are 18 years old and younger
- All other individuals will be contacted as capacity allows

Long term care facilities and schools remain a priority for the Walworth County Public Health Department. Employers are encouraged to contact the Public Health Department if they have two or more positive employees, which is the definition of an outbreak.

As part of our response, the Walworth County Public Health Department is asking for the assistance of Walworth County residents to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Please review the following guidance:

If you are awaiting COVID-19 test results:

- If you have concern that you may have been in close contact with anyone who has or suspected to have COVID-19 or if you are exhibiting any symptoms, it is recommended that you test for COVID-19. You should stay home away from others while waiting for your test results even if you are not experiencing any symptoms. Anyone that lives in your household should also stay home while until you get the test results.
- If you have no reason to believe that you may have been in close contact and are not exhibiting any symptoms, but you took a test for some other reason, such as a pre-screen for a medical procedure, you are not required to isolate while awaiting the results.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19:

- Answer your phone. A Public Health Nurse or Disease Investigator may be contacting you to ask about your symptoms and provide you with guidance and resources.
- Notify your close contacts. A close contact is anyone with whom you have had physical contact or who has been within 6 feet of you for 15 minutes or more (either continuously or over any 24-hour period). Talk to anyone who was a close contact two days before you started to have symptoms through the end of your isolation. If you did not experience symptoms at the time of the test, talk to anyone you had close contact with two days prior to taking the test through the end of your isolation. Let them know that you tested positive for COVID-19 and instruct them to quarantine for at least 14 days from when the close contact occurred.
- Notify your employer, school, or other organizations you were at so they can complete contact tracing and quarantine those that were exposed.
- Stay home. Stay home and away from household members until you finish your isolation period.

If you have been told by someone who tested positive that you are a close contact:

- Stay home and self-quarantine. You should quarantine for at least 14 days from when the close contact occurred.
- If you develop symptoms, isolate from others and contact your health care provider.
- Recent CDC guidance indicates that even if you test negative for COVID-19 or feel healthy, you should stay home (quarantine) since symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus.

If you have not tested positive, are not a close contact, or are unaware if you are a close contact:

- Avoid large gatherings.
- Wear a mask or face covering. Face coverings limit the chances of spreading the virus from person to person.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Maintain physical distance. Physical distancing can decrease the risk of spreading or catching the virus.
- Stay home if you feel sick. If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, no matter how mild, stay home. Do not go to work, school, or run errands.
- Keep track of your close contacts. If you do get sick and test positive for COVID-19, you will need to know who you have been in contact with for at least the last two days prior to getting sick or a positive test result so you can notify them.

Walworth County Public Health Department thanks everyone for doing their part to help keep the community safe. "By working together, we can slow the spread and keep our businesses and schools open," said Bergstrom. If you have questions or would like more information, please visit our website or email walcoph@co.walworth.wi.us.