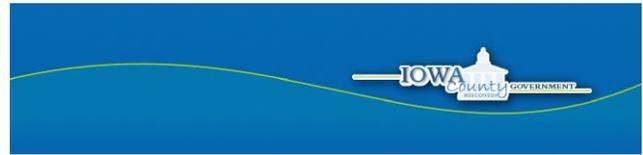


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For Immediate Release

Iowa County Health Department

Director/Health Officer

Debbie Siegenthaler RN, MSN

Guidance on Gatherings

Iowa County – We are four months into a pandemic that we all wish would disappear, right? Your local health department could not agree more, however, this virus and the pandemic it has caused will be with us for a while.

All social interaction has some level of risk for contracting COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself and others is to continue maintaining your physical distance from other people, stay away from large groups, stay home if you are sick, wash your hands, and wear a cloth face covering. People need to know the risks and balance those with the benefits to make the best decision for their families. In all cases, however, people should understand their personal responsibility to not unknowingly spread infection to someone else.

We want to stress that the protective measures listed above remain important. “We know some people may think they are unnecessary but please understand that the virus is still in the community. We can and should move forward but must do so slowly and safely”, says Debbie Siegenthaler, Iowa County Health Department Director. COVID-19 doesn't spread itself. People spread it. We don't have a cure or a vaccine yet. Our best tool is isolation for those we know are sick and physically distancing ourselves from others. Each of us represents an opportunity to interrupt the transmission of this virus. This week's COVID 19 Dashboard reveals that 100% of recent cases did not have direct exposure to a person known to have COVID 19. This means they are not sure how they became infected. This means that we are experiencing community spread or a wide circulation of the virus. This fact, coupled with significant increases in cases in neighboring counties, also means we need to be cautious.

A critical message to reinforce is that this virus is very efficient at finding people to infect. As a result, anytime people come together, the virus has a chance to find a new person to infect. A question we often receive is regarding planning for summer events, including large gatherings such as weddings, graduations, or community events such as fairs or festivals. At this time, large gatherings are advised against. Public health experts agree that large gatherings of people in sustained, close contact greatly increases the risk for spread of the virus among those who attend the events and to the communities these individuals return to after the event. The communal nature of such events makes it especially challenging to accommodate the physical distancing and sanitation recommendations required to slow the spread of disease.

The Iowa County Health Department currently recommends you not engage in public or private gatherings of people indoors of more than 10 people and outdoors of more than 25 people. This recommendation will change in the near future as we move forward and monitor the status of our dashboard metrics each week. It is important to monitor positivity case rates, local health and response system capacity, community spread and management of outbreaks. As we progress, the recommended maximum size of gatherings will also increase. The next phase of recommendations includes a recommendation of public or private gatherings of people indoors of no more than 50 people and outdoors of more than 100 people. The gathering recommendation also includes

maintaining physical distancing and protective measures such as cleaning, sanitizing, wearing masks and handwashing.

In terms of planning events for this summer or fall, the best guidance is to *proceed with caution*. Begin with asking how you will ensure physical distancing and sanitation and other protective measure recommendations required to slow the spread of disease. Also consider attendees who are high risk, such as grandparents or those with chronic medical conditions. They should not be asked to choose between putting their health at risk or missing an important memory. Wherever possible, we urge event organizers to host virtual or other non-contact events that can build the same sense of community and celebration.

See the Iowa County [website](#) for Guidance on Gatherings.

Important Sources of Information

- **211 Wisconsin** is an easy and helpful resource for COVID 19 questions. Simply call 211 from your phone <https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/>

Recently updated resources on the Iowa County website.

<https://www.iowacounty.org/departments/COVID-19>

Reopening Guidance

Reduce Risk of Exposure and Transmission

Guidance on Gatherings

Additional resources:

CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

Please monitor the following Social Media sites:

Iowa County Public Health on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/iowacountyhealthdepartment/>

Upland Hills Health on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/UplandHillsHealthHospital/>

Iowa County Emergency Management on Twitter - <https://twitter.com/ICEMWI>

Iowa County Emergency Management on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/icemwi/>

Monitor the following websites:

Iowa County COVID 19 <https://www.iowacounty.org/>

Upland Hills Health <https://www.uplandhillshealth.org/patient-visitors/covid-19/>

WI Department of Health Services (DHS) <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/outbreaks/index.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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