



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: November 18, 2020
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Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative Update: Community in Crisis

Summary

The levels of COVID-19 in our community, our county, the region and the state of Wisconsin are in crisis. The past week exceeded previous projections in the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19. Key metrics have yet again moved the wrong direction. One in three people tested for COVID-19 in our county tests positive. Hospitals are in distress. Public health departments cannot keep up.

The need for action by the community is urgent. **Without action the worst is yet to come.** Talk to your staff and coworkers, talk to your family and friends. This is tough and it is tiring, but your actions save lives. It only works if we do it together. Our community must come together to slow this down.

Individuals and Families

Personal gatherings continue to cause significant numbers of cases. Gatherings prior to hunting trips and religious and cultural gatherings were most prevalent this week. This past week also saw multiple exposures as a result of time spent in a bar, particularly among patrons not wearing masks or physical distancing.

For **Individuals and Families**, the Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative recommends all people:

- **Stay home.**
 - If you leave your home, do it for the essentials and nothing else.
 - Cancel all travel and social gatherings. Do not interact with people you do not live with.
 - Support local businesses by ordering take-out for a meal or picking up items curbside.
 - Avoid all businesses or locations that are not following recommendations on masks, physical distancing and capacity limits.
 - Make plans for safer holiday gatherings. Thanksgiving celebrations held between multiple households are not recommended.
- **Wear a mask.**
 - Indoors and out, anytime you're around someone who does not live with you.
- **Practice physical distancing if you must be in contact with others – stay 6 feet apart.**
- **Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your face.**
 - Use hand sanitizer if a sink is not available.
- **Get tested. Know your status.**
 - Call your health care provider or visit a community testing site.
 - At [community testing sites](#) anyone can be tested – symptoms or not.
 - If you test positive isolate immediately, [complete our case form](#), and notify your contacts.
 - If you have symptoms or are a contact of a positive, quarantine while you wait for your results.
- **Get your flu shot.**
 - The flu shot does not protect against COVID-19, but by protecting you from the flu, we keep the number of people needing hospitalizations due to flu down.

- **Be a leader in your circle.**
 - Check in on family and friends with a call or online chat. Talk about the importance of following these safety precautions.
 - Have the courage to challenge misinformation and share helpful resources.

Businesses and Employers

The single largest source of COVID-19 transmission (outside of household spread) this week has been workplace exposures. There are significant numbers of people reporting multiple cases linked to their place of employment. Some have reported being compelled to report to work even after they were known to be a high-risk close contact. Some businesses are trying to shorten or ignore quarantine requirements for their employees, leading to even larger workplace outbreaks. Quarantines are critically important to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in businesses.

For **Business and Employers**, The Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative recommends all establishments:

- **Do not shorten quarantine. Do not direct any symptomatic or exposed employee to report to work. A negative test result does not shorten a quarantine.**
- Require masks, indoors and out for staff and all patrons.
- Whenever possible, allow employees to work from home.
- [Screen employees](#) who need to report to work in-person for symptoms and exposures.
- Bars and restaurants should prioritize offering take out and curbside service, rather than in-person service. **Bars and restaurants should be closed for on-premise consumption between 10 pm and 4 am.**
- **All businesses should limit capacity to 25% of total capacity or 50 people whichever is less, indoors or out.**
- Cancel or reschedule any large in-person event, sports or gatherings for the next 30 days.

Schools and Universities

This week saw large numbers of cases related to K-12 schools, with a significant number coming from private schools who are open for in-person learning. A case in a school-age child often spreads to peers, to family members, to teachers and staff and then ripples outwards into the community. Many cases have also been connected to extracurricular activities, including but not limited to sports. We also saw the number of cases in college-age students increase this week.

For **Schools and Universities**, the Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative recommends:

- **All in-person sports, chorus, clubs, practices, and group activities should be cancelled for the next 30 days.**
- Virtual learning is recommended unless schools can **strictly** follow their own COVID-19 safety plans, abide by isolation and quarantine recommendations, universal masking requirements, physical distancing guidelines (6 feet), and limit to 25% of room capacity or 10 people, whichever is less.

Churches and Places of Worship

This week saw at least four clusters of cases from places of worship, in which a leader or church member attended in-person services while ill and caused spread. We will not know the full extent of these clusters for another 2-3 weeks. These clusters caused wider spread due to activities such as unmasked singing, lack of mask wearing in general, and lack of physical distancing.

For **Churches and Places of Worship**, the Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative recommends:

- Worship, classes, meetings, chorus and gatherings should be online only.

Every municipality and every age range, without exception, has a high case rate. Both Gundersen Health System and Mayo Clinic Health System remain under significant stress. The metric remains yellow, but only because hospitals are adding additional units to care for COVID-19 patients. Clinics and hospitals are seeing critical staffing shortages. The risk of running out of beds to care for patients is high. A hospital metric turning yellow to red could mean:

- Patients are in tents or being transported to ICUs hours away because there are no beds.
- Being forced to bring employees with active COVID-19 infections back to work.
- Rationing patient care and a need for refrigerated morgue trucks.

Metrics

The Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative (a partnership between Gundersen Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System, La Crosse County and other stakeholders). For a full report visit couleecovid19.org. Using the Harvard Global Health Institute model as a guide for assessing the level of COVID-19, the metrics show:

Data for the week ending 11/15/2020:

Metrics 1 – 3

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|----------|---|---|---|
| Metric 1 | New case rate* Case trend as an estimate from new deaths trend** | 109.2 per 100,000/day 60.5 per 100,000/day | Concern and Steady**** Concern and Growing |
| Metric 2 | New hospitalizations rate (7 day rolling average) | 27.6 per 100,000/day | Concern and Growing |
| Metric 3 | Hospitalization Care Capacity | | Caution |

Community, Public Health and Testing Metrics 4-9

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|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Metric 4 | Cases Interviewed in 2 days | 61.3% | Concern |
| Metric 5 | Identified contacts traced | 58.0% | Concern |
| Metric 6 | Contacts reached 1-2 days | 56.7% | Concern |
| Metric 7*** | Daily testing goal | 64.3% of goal | Concern |
| Metric 8 | Testing turnaround time within 2 days | 39.6% | Concern |
| Metric 9 | Positive test ratio | 29.3% | Concern |

*Case rate includes only PCR tests. Antigen tests are not included and represent additional burden.

**Metric 1 includes two data points; the higher of the two data points affects the metric.

***Testing goal varies based on disease activity.

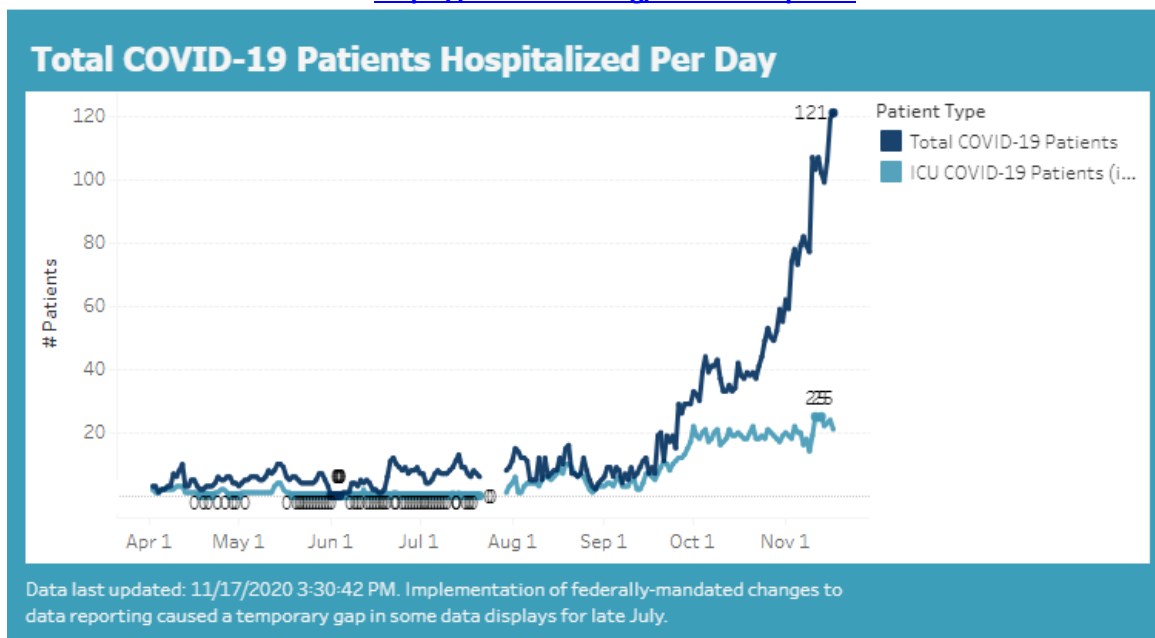
****Case trend is steady but delays due to a lab-related reporting issue means it is likely growing.

Metrics and all recommendations available at www.couleecovid19.org

Hospital Data

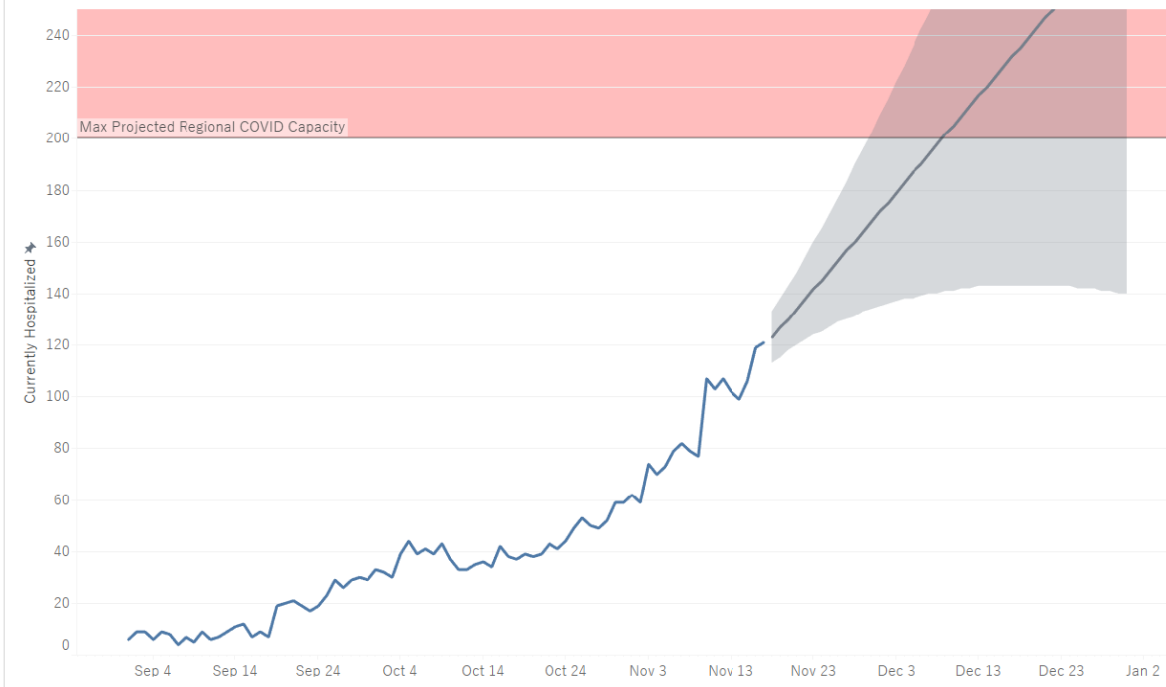
Western Region Hospitalizations as of 11/17/2020 provided by Wisconsin Hospital Association.

*Additional Information from <https://www.wha.org/COVID19Update>



Projected hospitalizations based on local data

Projected trajectory of hospitalizations in the Western Region in the absence of public behavior change



Availability of critical care beds (7-day rolling average)

