

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 16, 2023

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: The Office of the County Executive

Subject: Report from the Office of the County Executive, providing information on current COVID-19 mitigation procedures, and the actions Milwaukee County is continuing to take to ensure it keeps its workforce and the people they serve safe.

File Type: Informational

BACKGROUND

Throughout the pandemic, the goal of Milwaukee County's COVID-19 pandemic management process has been to continue County government operations and critical services for its residents, while keeping its staff and participants, as well as the wider community, safe. Milwaukee County government has many public-facing operations, often interacts with particularly vulnerable individuals, and is responsible for several of the largest congregate facilities in the county.

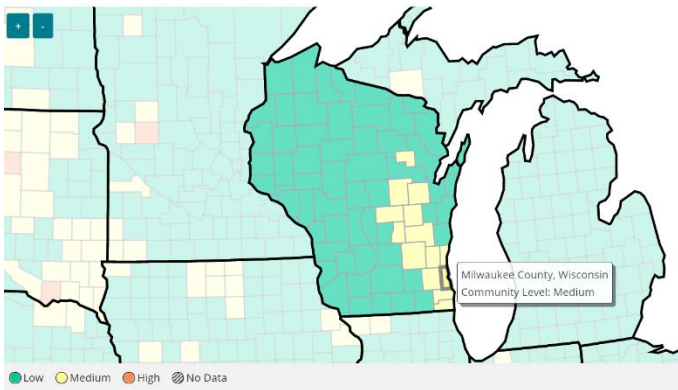
A comprehensive mitigation strategy is crucial to ensuring that Milwaukee County government can continue providing the critical services upon which many of our residents depend, while keeping employees and those service users as safe as possible from COVID-19.

The foundation of Milwaukee County's COVID-19 mitigation process is the CDC COVID-19 Community Level framework. This framework, released in late February 2022, classifies community risk into three levels - Low, Medium, and High. The CDC uses the combination of the three metrics referenced below to determine the COVID-19 community level.

- COVID-19 Cases per 100/k Residents
- COVID-19 Hospital Admissions per 100/k Residents
- COVID-19 Inpatient Bed Utilization

New COVID-19 admissions and the percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied represent the current potential for strain on the health system. Data on new cases acts as an early warning indicator of potential increases in health system strain in the event of a COVID-19 surge.

CURRENT STATE



As of Thursday, February 9, 2023, the CDC continues to classify Milwaukee County's COVID-19 community risk level as "**medium**". The County moved to "medium" on October 13, 2022, when the hospital admittance rate exceeded 10 per 100,000 residents.

The table below indicates the County's most current data published by the CDC on February 9, 2023. The number of cases has steadily decreased since December 22, 2022. Over that time the number of cases per 100,000 residents has fallen by approximately 52%. Similar favorable declines are evidenced in the other measures too, for example hospital admissions per 100,000 residents has decreased 36% over a similar timeframe and the percentage of hospital beds used by COVID-19 patients has decreased by 3 percentage points. In addition, approximately 81% of Wisconsin counties are classified as "low" risk.

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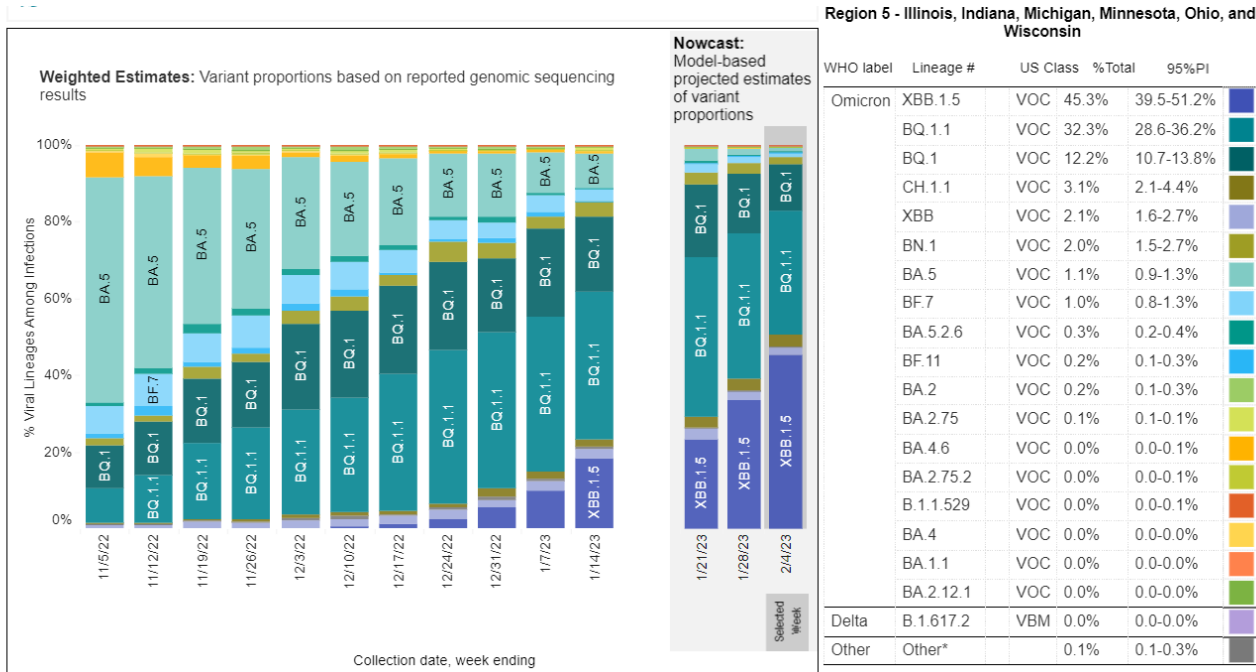
Case Rate per 100,000 population	81.42
New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population	10
% Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19	4.4%

The most likely scenario for Milwaukee County's risk classification to return to "low" is continued decreases in the number of new COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 residents. As of February 9, 2023, it is exactly at 10 per 100,000. If these trends continue, Milwaukee County will be classified as "low" risk in the next few weeks. Similar favorable trends are occurring throughout the country with steady declines in cases, hospital admissions and hospital capacity throughout the United States.

While the CDC Community Risk levels only uses the three measures listed above to determine the level of risk, other measures can also be useful in assessing the level of COVID-19 risk in Milwaukee County. For example, the percentage of positive tests may provide a more accurate assessment than just reviewing the case rate. As of February 5, the seven-day average for the percentage of positive tests is 10.2% This too has been steadily declining since early January.

Another key metric is the level of COVID-19 indicated in wastewater. Monitoring COVID in wastewater can be an early indicator of increases or decreases in the levels of COVID in the community. As of February 1, the 14-day average of Million Gene Copies (MGC) indicated in the Jones Island sewershed is 52.50 and 23.75 in the South Shore sewershed. Overall, this metric has been decreasing since January.

The public health community is closely monitoring COVID-19 variants. The XBB.1.5 variant now represents approximately 66% of the cases nationwide. In the Great Lakes region, it represents approximately 45%. The table below indicates the percentage of COVID-19 variants in the Great Lakes region as of February 4.



The World Health Organization (WHO) has labeled the XBB.1.5 variant the most transmissible COVID-19 variant to date. While it is considered to be highly transmissible, it does not appear to have greater severity than previous variants.

CURRENT MITIGATION STEPS

Masking

Masking guidelines have remained at the medium risk level since October 13, 2022. Because of the increased risk to County employees and the potentially vulnerable people they serve, and under the advisement of Dr. Weston, masking is maintained in many public areas of Milwaukee County facilities including the Courthouse and Milwaukee County Transit System buses. A link to the masking guidelines table is pasted below:

[FaceMaskPolicySummaryTable \(milwaukee.gov\)](https://www.milwaukee.gov/FaceMaskPolicySummaryTable)

Capacity

Capacity guidelines also remain at “medium” status. The capacity guidelines format was significantly revised in May and is now more closely aligned with the CDC Community Risk Levels. Listed below are the current “medium” classification guidelines:

- Telework encouraged where possible
- Limit in-person meetings
- Provide appropriate spacing options
- Ensure the availability of high-quality masks
- Maintain improved ventilation throughout public and private indoor spaces when possible
- Consider in-person participant vulnerability

OTHER UPDATES

With COVID-19 conditions relatively stable, the COVID-19 Workgroup now only meets on an as needed basis. The CDC community risk level is monitored weekly, and changes in the County's COVID mitigation guidelines will be implemented and adjusted as necessary.

NEXT STEPS

The COVID-19 Workgroup will continue to monitor the COVID-19 data, and under the advisement of Dr. Weston, take the appropriate steps continue to keep Milwaukee County employees, and the people they serve, safe.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Mitigating the spread of COVID-19, and thus preventing further death and long-term negative health effects, is one of the most meaningful steps that Milwaukee County government can take in service of our Vision to become the healthiest county in Wisconsin. While we must still address the disparities and negative health outcomes that are the result of decades of policy choices, COVID-19 is a clear and present danger to the health and well-being of our constituents and employees. This framework not only works to address the health aspects of our strategic plan, but also ensures that Milwaukee County is able to continue the work that our departments are undertaking to advance our strategic plan and work towards our Vision by providing critical services to our residents.

FISCAL EFFECT

Fiscal Note Not Required

TERMS

N/A

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