

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 2, 2022

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.

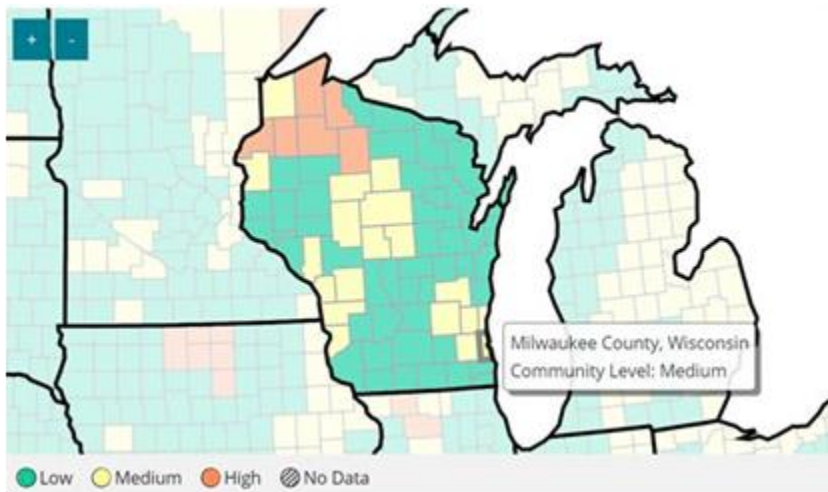
A comprehensive mitigation strategy is crucial to ensuring that Milwaukee County government can continue providing the critical services upon which many of our residents depend, while keeping employees and those service users as safe as possible from COVID-19.

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, October 27, 2022, the CDC continues to classify Milwaukee County's COVID-19 community risk level as **"medium"**. After several weeks at "low" 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 October 27, 2022. The number of cases increased by approximately 5.6% over the previous week, but with the

prevalence of home testing, the number of positive cases is likely much higher. The number of admissions increased by approximately 10% over the previous week. Inpatient bed utilization has remained relatively steady since starting to increase on April 14. It did increase by almost 9% over the previous week. The results of these measures indicate the continued significant prevalence of COVID-19 in our community.

Case Rate per 100,000 population	119.06
New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population	11.6
% Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19	4.5%

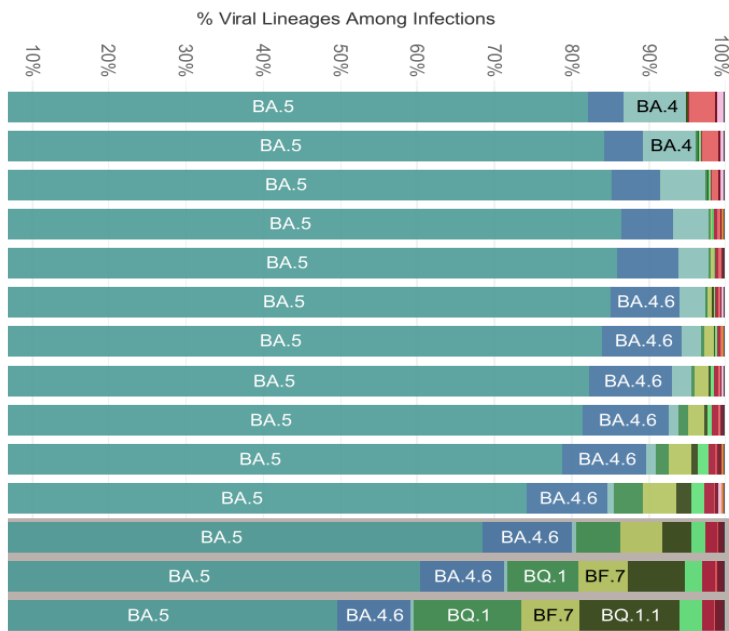
The most likely scenario for Milwaukee County's risk classification to return to "high" is continued increases in hospital admissions. It is currently at 11.6 and would need to meet or exceed 20 admissions on a per capita basis to move to "high". Moving below 10 per 100,000 would move Milwaukee County back to the "low" risk level.

While the CDC Community Risk levels only use 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. The percentage of positive tests continues to remain below 10% but has been increasing for the last several weeks. It currently stands at 9.4%.

Another key metric is the level of COVID-19 indicated in wastewater. Monitoring COVID in wastewater can be an early indicator of increases or decrease of the levels of COVID in the community. As of October 27, the level of COVID indicated in the Jones Island sewershed is 11.7 per 100,000 residents. This is slightly lower than the previous weekly averages and may indicate the beginning of a favorable trend.

The public health community is closely monitoring COVID-19 variants. After many months of primarily BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron variants, other variants are beginning to emerge and grow more prevalent. The CDC is closely tracking a wide range of Omicron sublineages, including three drawing recent attention. BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 which are offshoots of the BA.5 that's been dominant for months. CDC data show that they seem to be spreading relatively quickly so far, but they're still a small proportion of overall variants. CDC is also keeping a close eye on a sublineage called XBB based on

international reports, although it's still very rare in the United States. The figure below indicates the percentage of COVID-19 cases in the United States attributed to each variant as of October 29, 2022. The impact of these variants is yet to be determined.



CURRENT MITIGATION STEPS

Masking

Moving to the “medium” risk level required an update to the County’s masking guidelines. Because of the increased risk to County employees and the potentially vulnerable people they serve, and under the advisement of Dr. Weston, masking returned to 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_HighRiskLevel.pdf \(milwaukee.gov\)](#)

Capacity

Capacity guidelines are 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 “high” 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

The COVID-19 workgroup partnered with communications and marketing to implement a recognition program. Employees from across the County submitted testimonials recognizing individuals and groups. Those testimonials can be found here:

[COVID Heroes \(milwaukeecountywi.gov\)](https://www.milwaukeecountywi.gov)

The COVID-19 Workgroup updated a variety of guidance documents to reflect recent CDC updates, these include updates to the Exposure, Symptom and Positive Test decision trees along with other documentation to assist managers and other County leaders.

The COVID-19 Workgroup will continue to provide ongoing informational and educational COVID-19 information to help employees keep themselves, the people they serve, and their families safe. This will become especially important as employees and the community in general begins to spend more time indoors as autumn turns to winter.

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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NA

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