

## COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE Inter-Office Communication

Date: March 14, 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

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### **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.

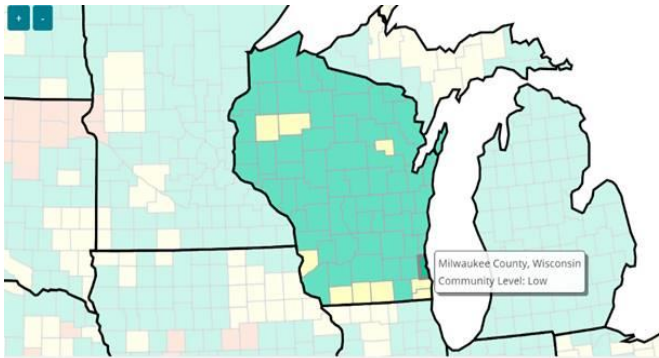
A comprehensive mitigation strategy is crucial to ensuring that Milwaukee County government can continue providing the critical services upon which many of our residents depend, while keeping employees and those service users as safe as possible from COVID-19.

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, March 9, 2023, the CDC continues to classify Milwaukee County's COVID-19 community risk level as "**low**". The County moved to "low" on February 16, 2023, when the hospital admittance rate moved to less than 10 per 100,000 residents.

The table below indicates the County's most current data published by the CDC on March 9, 2023. The number of cases has steadily decreased since

December 15, 2022. Over that time the number of cases per 100,000 residents has fallen by approximately 57%. Similar favorable declines are evidenced in the other measures too, for example hospital admissions per 100,000 residents has decreased 56% over a similar timeframe and the percentage of hospital beds used by COVID-19 patients has decreased by 4.3 percentage points.

In addition, 87.5% of Wisconsin counties are classified as "low" risk and no counties are currently classified as high risk.

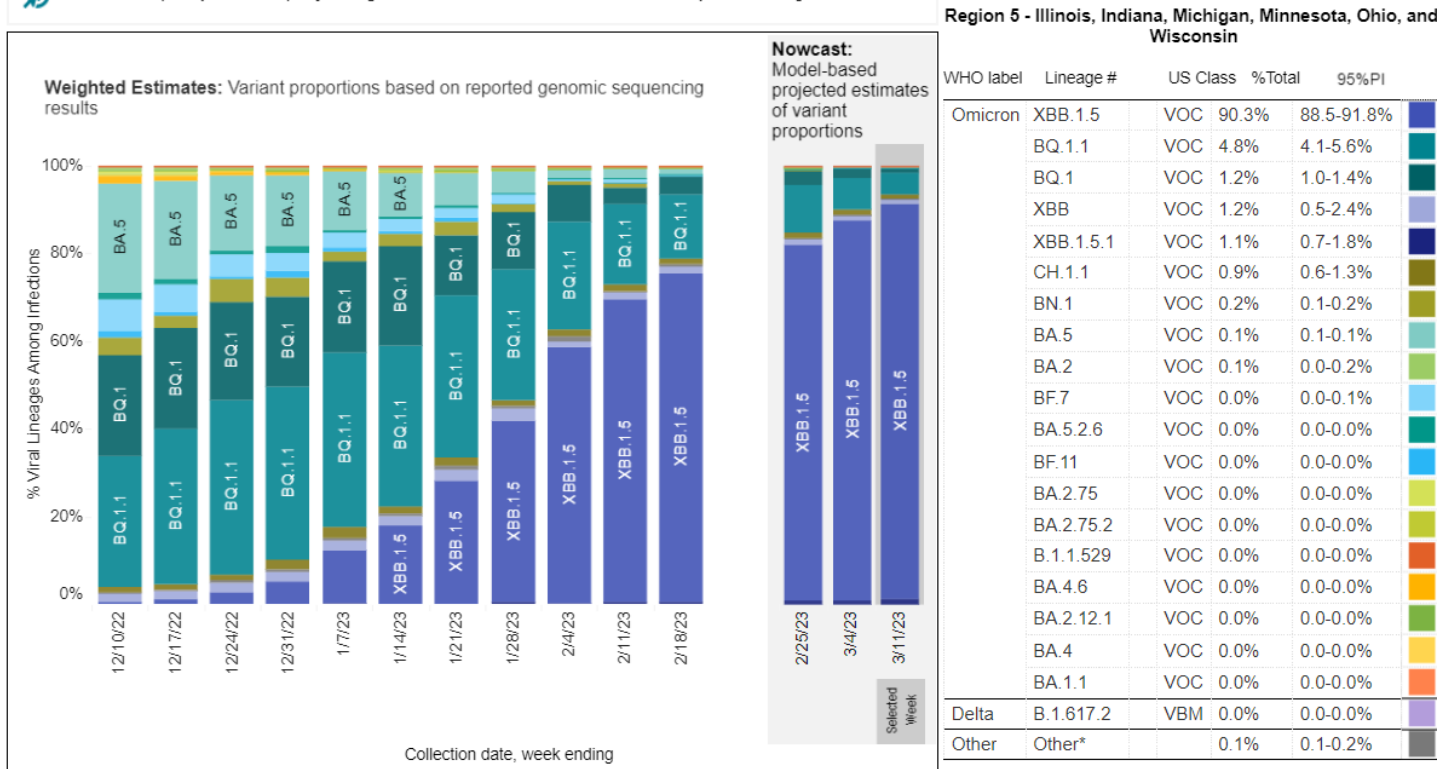
Case Rate per 100,000 population	73.81
New COVID-19 admissions per 100,000 population	7
% Staffed inpatient beds in use by patients with confirmed COVID-19	3.1%

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. As of March 4, the seven-day average for the percentage of positive tests is 11.9%. This too has been steadily declining since February.

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 26, the 14-day average of Million Gene Copies (MGC) indicated in the Jones Island sewershed is 56.26 and 27.54 in the South Shore sewershed. Overall, this metric has been decreasing in both sewersheds since January.

The public health community closely monitors COVID-19 variants. The XBB.1.5 variant now represents approximately 89.5% of the cases nationwide. In the Great Lakes region, it represents approximately 90.3%. The table below indicates the percentage of COVID-19 variants in the Great Lakes region as of March 11, 2023.



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 were updated to the low risk level on February 16, 2023. At the low risk level masking is no longer required in all areas of the Courthouse and on MCTS buses. A link to the masking guidelines table is pasted below:

[FaceMaskPolicySummaryTable \(milwaukee.gov\)](#)

**Capacity**

Capacity guidelines were also updated to “low” 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 “low” classification guidelines:

- Follow departmental guidelines for in-person and telework options
- Ensure the availability of high-quality (N95 or KN95) 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.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services announced in February that it was ending its program to provide financial support for COVID testing in incarceration facilities. The Milwaukee County Jail and the Community Reintegration Center began participating in this program in September of 2022. As congregate living centers, the Jail and the CRC are considered at high risk for the spread of COVID. Leaders from these facilities are working with Milwaukee County's public health advisors on determining next steps. ARPA resources are available to support testing and other mitigation approaches at these facilities.

### **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

### **VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

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### **APPROVED BY:**

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### **ATTACHMENTS:**

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