

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: 3.3.2020
TO: Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Christine Westrich, Director, Office of Emergency Management
SUBJECT: From the Director of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM),
an Informational Report on current activities and considerations for
COVID-19

OVERVIEW

The Director of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is engaged in preparedness and operational activities for the County of Milwaukee partnering with countywide agencies, the City of Milwaukee Health Department, Wisconsin Emergency Management and FEMA Region V officials.

BACKGROUND

To date, there has been one confirmed case in Wisconsin, 20 suspected cases, 18 of which tested negative and two that are pending. These numbers are changing daily and an update will be provided at the County Board Standing Committee. Global dashboard tracking can be found on [Johns Hopkins COVID-19](#) site which reports 102 confirmed cases in the US, 7 recovered patients and six deaths occurring in Washington state.

Of note, while the virus originated in Wuhan, China, ethnicity or ancestry does not make a person more vulnerable to this illness; COVID-19 does not recognize race, nationality nor ethnicity. E.g., profiling a symptomatic Asian American visitor as a potential carrier of the virus is discriminatory.

Estimates on COVID-19's lethality are generally being compared to that of the seasonal flu because much is unknown on the existence of mild or symptom-free cases. Less than 1% of those infected with the seasonal flu die; the 2019 seasonal flu fatality figure is 18,000 in the US. The warranted Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) is related to the math that even a relatively low death rate can take a significant toll when large numbers of people are infected.

Understanding of the spread of COVID-19 is emerging, however, it is similar to that of influenza. It is primarily thought to be person-to-person through respiratory droplets (coughs, sneezes) and through touch of a surface (desk, iPhone) that has the virus on it and then touching one's own mouth/nose/eyes.

Communications on prevention to employees mirrors the guidance of the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and includes self-help behaviors such as covering sneezes and coughs, throwing out used tissue, washing hands or using hand sanitizer frequently, and then, if one is faced with a fever, cough or cold symptoms, to limit their

exposure to friends and family and to stay at home.

The option of staying home is not to be taken for granted as newer employees have limited access to sick time. Similarly, a County employee's partner may be employed in profession (service industry, e.g., restaurants, retail) that offers little to no support for paid sick time or employer-provided health insurance causing the County employee to use their time off to tend to a sick relative or a child when a school closes disproportionately affecting lower income families. This is further explained in this report under "fiscal impact".

The DAS Facilities Maintenance Division (FMD) has placed extra hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the Courthouse Complex alongside CDC signage on personal behaviors that are proven to limit the spread of flu and/or COVID-19.

Respiratory masks generally consist of two types, surgical masks which protect from large droplets and are fluid resistant; and, the N-95 mask which serves as a barrier to 95% of airborne particles. The N-95 mask requires fit testing and is reserved for healthcare workers. The looser fitting surgical mask is intended for donning by persons who exhibit symptoms of any respiratory virus. Currently, surgical masks are provided for sick visitors at the Behavioral Health Division as they are an in-patient care facility.

The MKE Airport and MCTS are in unique positions with several thousand persons transiting and utilizing their services daily. Both departments are actively engaged with oversight (e.g., TSA) and peer agencies across the US in best practices while also conducting increased cleaning and disinfection of public areas.

OEM issued a Numbered Notice in January to all paramedics and EMTs operating within our County regarding precautions related to personal protective equipment (PPE) and decontamination of equipment. Additional measures include notifying the OEM Communications Center of patients that meet COVID-19 symptoms and travel history or exposure to confirmed patients who in turn notify the receiving hospital with an isolation alert for patient quarantine upon arrival.

Additionally, OEM is implementing guidance to local 9-1-1 centers on screening callers for COVID-19 symptoms and history of travel and exposure to COVID-19. The lack of universal governance or a unified 9-1-1 center in Milwaukee County has driven OEM to distribute such guidance to our local law enforcement agencies, although this cannot be enforced. Cooperation and partnership were evident in the Molson Coors active shooter event and are ongoing in DNC planning; OEM is optimistic that COVID-19 guidelines will be implemented countywide.

During a declared public health emergency, the City of Milwaukee's Health Department Commissioner becomes the County Public Health Director. Thus, OEM is working closely with the City on the latest situation reports, preventative measures and planning for worse-case scenarios that involve social distancing.

In social distancing, persons are required by their municipal health department to isolate themselves and schools, events and social gatherings may be under forced closure. This is evident overseas in several countries such as China and Italy.

Planning for the DNC has bolstered the County's preparedness as individual departmental Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) are under review and the option to telework is encouraged. Requirements for working at alternate locations or from home do include laptops and internet access which is a limitation for some departments; however, OEM, IMSD and FMD are actively exploring these costs and steps to implementation.

Not all departments and agencies have the luxury of working remotely and areas such as our Criminal Justice Facility and House of Corrections are looking very closely at minimum staffing level thresholds and tightly monitoring involuntary clients that are sick as well as employees.

Ongoing coordination is occurring every Friday during an OEM-led conference call and biweekly Courthouse Safety and Security Committee meetings. As needed coordination is occurring daily amongst all stakeholders and will continue as COVID-19 spreads and more is learned about both its prevention and reproduction.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is informational and intended to raise awareness on County preparedness activities and operational planning related to the continued COVID-19 spread.

FISCAL IMPACT

The procurement of hand sanitizer is being absorbed in the DAS Facilities Management Division budget as well as other departments that maintain their own facilities such as the Airport, Behavioral Health Division, DOT, House of Corrections, MCTS, Parks, and the Zoo.

Costs for lost productivity due to employee time off is uncertain. Newer employees may be faced with little accrued sick time and face the abnormality of requesting unpaid leave from their Department Head for up to thirty days when paid time off runs out. Civil Service Rule VIII Section 2 outlines personal leaves of absence (unpaid leave).

Human Resources, the Comptroller, the Office of the County Executive and OEM are actively engaged in discussions surrounding benefits across the spectrum of employees to include those with significant tenure and our new hires. There is no short-term or long-term disability leave for County employees making new employees vulnerable as sick time cannot be used for six months; even longer-tenured employees that have 960 hours of sick time can be in dire straits without disability insurance beyond that time period.

The lack of a salary-recovery policy for medical needs places more harm on those that earn the least, have partners in the service industry without employer-provided insurance, and on those without family or social supports. These inequities are known

and actively being addressed by the County's administration.

In summary, budgetary impacts could be significant should a public health emergency be declared requiring telework and social distancing. The aforementioned IT infrastructure (laptops, internet), short-term disability, and even the housing of sick individuals to prevent hospital overload are a few known costs that OEM is exploring with IMSD, HR and DAS Economic Development.

Lastly, OEM is closely following the situation in Seattle's King County in order to stay ahead of vulnerabilities and ensure we maximize our preparedness.



Christine Westrich
Director, Office of Emergency Management

Attachments: None

CC: Chris Abele, County Executive
Supervisor James "Luigi" Schmitt, Chair, Committee on Finance & Audit
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