



**PRESS RELEASE**

**March 9, 2020**

## **PORTAGE COUNTY MONITORING & ONGOING RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As of Monday, March 9, there have been no reported cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Portage County. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has reported two confirmed cases in the state. The first case has been cleared by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and is no longer in isolation. The second case is currently isolated at home.

Portage County Division of Public Health officials have been engaged in extensive community outreach and education. This includes working directly with our school districts, local health system partners, emergency medical services, and other community organizations. As we continue to monitor the situation locally, across the state, in the US, and abroad, Portage County residents will receive regular updates from the county, even if there is nothing new to report. Given the amount of misinformation and speculation that is occurring, it is important for the public in Portage County to know they have a local source of timely information that they can rely upon.

As of the end of last week (March 6), Wisconsin DHS noted:

***“On February 5, 2020, Wisconsin confirmed its first case of COVID-19. On February 28, 2020, CDC confirmed that the case no longer has COVID-19 and is no longer under isolation. DHS is working closely with state and local partners to plan for and respond to the current situation.*”**

***This is a rapidly evolving and dynamic situation. There continues to be ongoing monitoring across the state. DHS is committed to protecting the health of all people in Wisconsin.***

***The CDC criteria for persons under investigation (PUI) has changed in the past week and most likely will be changing in the coming week ahead. For this reason, there has been a marked increase in the total number of people tested in Wisconsin. Moving forward, when laboratory testing for COVID-19 becomes widely available through commercial labs, DHS will only report on the positive and negative tests.”***

Much more information can be found by clicking on the “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)” link found in the “**In The Spotlight**” section of the Portage County homepage. That section is found at: <https://www.co.portage.wi.us/home> and is located on the bottom left of the county webpage.

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. That said, the following risk assessments can help you better understand where we are at today. These assessments, along with most of the available data we have on COVID-19, will continue to be updated:

Current risk assessment:

- For the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.
- People in communities where ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19 has been reported are at elevated though still relatively low risk of exposure.
- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19 also are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is occurring also are at elevated risk of exposure.

More cases of COVID-19 are likely to be identified in the coming days, including more cases in the United States. It's also likely that person-to-person spread will continue to occur, including in communities in the United States. It's likely that at some point, widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States will occur.

At this time, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and no medications approved to treat it. Nonpharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) would be the most important response strategy. NPIs are actions, apart from getting vaccinated and taking medicine, that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of illnesses like pandemic influenza (flu).

NPIs are also known as community mitigation strategies. For more information on NPIs please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html>

The work that has been ongoing here in Portage County will continue as this situation unfolds. Members of the community should monitor the county website for information updates. There are numerous links to the CDC and others who will also be updating their information as we work through this. Below are examples of the information that can be monitored online:

Wisconsin DHS Outbreaks and Investigations (updated by 2pm on weekdays)  
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/outbreaks/index.htm>

Update and Interim Guidance on Outbreak of COVID-19  
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00428.asp>

Everyday Preventative Actions  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/actions-prevent-flu.htm>

In the face of so much information and media coverage, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Here are some things that you can do to help:

- Continue to follow all guidance for improved personal hygiene such as regularly washing your hands with soap and for 20-30 seconds to ensure that your hands are clean and covering your sneezes as a precautionary measure or if you have a cold or seasonal flu.
- Stay home when you are sick. This is as true for COVID-19 as it is for other diseases.
- Droplets from coughs or sneezes that can contain the COVID-19 virus can travel up to six feet, so maintaining a distance of at least six feet from anyone who is ill will help to lower your chances of becoming sick.
- Keep informed about our local flu situation. It can be easy to feel as if what's happening somewhere else in the world may be happening here or may soon happen here. Rather than speculate, follow the information that is being updated and made available for the state of Wisconsin and Portage County.
- It is not known how long COVID-19 can remain viable on surfaces. Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects lowers the amount of the virus that can be spread when you touch an infected surface and then your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Issues related to public health depend precisely on us all working together with our healthcare and public health professionals. We are often inclined to look out for ourselves in times of uncertainty, but please do what you can to keep a watchful eye on others, especially our most vulnerable. We here at Portage County will continue to keep you up-to-date with accurate and timely information. We encourage you to share information with others so that there is greater awareness throughout the community and an appropriate focus on our community's well-being.

Thank you.

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