



For Immediate Release

July 30, 2020

Portage County Response to Executive Order #82 and Emergency Order #1

In the wake of Governor Evers issuing these two orders, County Executive Chris Holman stated, “However one feels about the virus and any of the issues surrounding our state and local responses to it, it has become abundantly clear over the past few months that counties and municipalities benefit from having guidance from the state on an issue that should be handled at the state level.” The order comes at a time when multiple municipalities across the state have been issuing their own orders via the authority granted to them in state statute and Constitutional Home Rule.

“Counties will continue the work they have been doing on establishing a body of knowledge and legal analysis to help guide the conversations that need to take place to figure out how counties and any future county actions fit within state statutes and the law in general. This is especially important work to continue, as the long-term future of these orders is uncertain.” Executive Holman explained.

Gary Garske, Division of Public Health Manager and Portage County Health Officer said, “Though this announcement changes the context we have been operating within, our work at Portage County will be largely unchanged. We will continue to work closely with all of our partners across the county and the community in general, and these orders provide us with yet another opportunity to communicate our message about how the public can best navigate an exceptionally challenging time due to COVID-19.”

Ray Przybelski, Director of Portage County’s Health and Human Services Department clarified that, “No one has a crystal ball with any of this, so no we did not expect a statewide mandate to be forthcoming. That said, we certainly recognize that there has been a lot of discussion over the last week, especially after Minnesota introduced their masking mandate. So, while not expected it’s also not surprising that there had been some consideration of a statewide mandate here in Wisconsin.”

The orders issued today will play an important role in how the virus spreads throughout our communities, and they will likely have an impact on overall caseload in Portage County and in the state. Garske added that he agreed with the statement provided by the Wisconsin Public Health Association and the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards which said, “Wearing a mask is a simple, effective way to protect our neighbors and in return protect ourselves. Numerous respected organizations have publicly endorsed wearing masks, including physician organizations like the Wisconsin Medical Society, the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians, and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.”

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that accompanied these orders also note that: Cloth face coverings (or face masks) are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), and healthcare professionals as an easy way to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. The entire FAQ document can be found at the following [link](#).

Numerous questions surrounding enforcement of the order have been raised, and while the details of that are forthcoming, there is an emphasis on those decisions being made locally. What's clear is that local health departments have been asked to assist in answering questions from the community, to maintain ongoing education efforts regarding social distancing practices, and addressing the questions around face coverings and how they can aid in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic and the worrisome trends being experienced in communities across Wisconsin.

Executive Holman concluded, "What's most important is that we continue to find positive and constructive ways to work together. This is why our approach has focused on creating the kinds of relationships that we want to have with our partners in the community and the public at-large. No matter what one thinks about any of this, we are all in this together."

More information will be provided as Portage County adjusts its operations to include these new orders.

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