



RAYMOND F. PRZYBELSKI, DIRECTOR
(715) 345-5350 or Toll Free (866) 920-2525
FAX (715) 345-5966

RUTH GILFRY HUMAN RESOURCES BUILDING
817 WHITING AVENUE
STEVENS POINT, WI 54481-5292

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: pcpublichealth@co.portage.wi.us

Safely Celebrating Labor Day Weekend

The upcoming Labor Day weekend poses an increased risk of spreading COVID-19 as the number of social gatherings rise. Labor Day typically is the time for end-of-summer reunions, cookouts, and community events; such as fairs, parades, and festivals. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to remember that the choices you make to participate in social events may impact your family members, friends, and the community.

Portage County remains identified as having a high level of COVID-19 activity by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). Recent data indicate that a high level of COVID-19 activity is strongly associated with social gathering activities. According to Wisconsin DHS, "The percent of people with confirmed cases of COVID-19 who reported attending a gathering, party, or meet up with people outside their home grew from 7% of cases in May to 21% of cases in June and 20% of cases in July." The Portage County Division of Public Health advises against participating in large gatherings while Portage County is experiencing high levels of COVID-19.

Event organizers and community members are asked to make sensible choices and act in the community's best interest by limiting gatherings and postponing social gathering type events to lessen community spread of COVID-19. Portage County Division of Public Health has been busy responding to numerous cases of COVID-19, including 30 new cases on Monday, August 31 an all-time new high since the pandemic began. Many cases have been traced back to individuals attending a gathering or social outing, with individuals between ages 20-29 being the largest percentage of cases.

If you plan to attend or host an event, such as a cookout or bonfire, this Labor Day weekend, use best practices to help protect yourself and others. Best practices include: hosting events outdoors, limiting the amount of people in attendance, knowing who are in company with, maintaining physical distance at least 6 feet from those that are not from your household, practicing good hand hygiene, wearing face coverings, and staying home if you are ill. If you plan to travel over the weekend, consider the COVID-19 activity level of where you are visiting as well as where you are coming from and plan to take steps to protect against the spread of COVID-19. Use this resource to plan for travel: <https://bit.ly/2Z2ccpj>

Consider using the decision tool, released by Wisconsin DHS, when exploring ways to minimize the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 when hosting or attending social gatherings. The tool helps to assess the safety of attending a gathering or event under consideration and how your decision to attend may impact yourself and

those you come in contact with. The Decision Tool can be found here: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/decision.htm>

COVID-19 can be prevented by:

- Staying home when ill
- Avoiding large gatherings
- Avoiding non-essential travel
- Wearing a cloth face covering
- Practicing physical distancing of at least 6 feet from people not in your household
- Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available
- Covering coughs and sneezes

Vulnerable populations, including the elderly and immunocompromised, have increased risk for serious and life-threatening complications, but anyone can develop symptoms or become seriously ill if infected with COVID-19. It is also important to remember that COVID-19 can be spread by those who are not experiencing symptoms, as recent cases in Portage County have shown.

To view the current status of COVID-19 activity in Portage County visit <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/local.htm> .

If you have questions or would like additional guidance, please call or email our department at (715) 345-5907 or PCPublicHealth@co.portage.wi.us.

If you have general COVID-19 questions call 2-1-1 or text your zip code to 898211 Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

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