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Emergency Order #3: Limiting Public Gatherings

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A new order directed by Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers through Department of Health Services (DHS) Secretary-designee Andrea Palm was issued to limit public gatherings to no more than 25 percent of a room or building's total occupancy. This order takes effect starting 8:00 a.m. on October 8th, 2020 and will remain in effect for two incubation periods of COVID-19, ending November 6th, 2020. The order implements limitations to gatherings to help decrease the number of COVID-19 cases, as Wisconsin is now a hotspot for COVID-19 with the third highest number of new cases in the past seven days in the nation. Emergency Order #3 and the list of exemptions can be viewed online [here](#).

"The unfortunate reality is this: the disease activity level of COVID-19 in Wisconsin is so high that going to a gathering puts you at very high risk of exposure," said DHS Secretary-designee Palm. "We know gatherings are a key way this virus spreads, so we must act to limit indoor gatherings to stop the spread, reduce illness, and save lives."

With the steep rise in COVID-19 cases over the past month, we are seeing the toll on our healthcare systems across the state. From September to October, the number of hospitalizations in Wisconsin has more than doubled, and hospital leaders in Green Bay, Appleton, Neenah, and Wausau are reporting ICU's at capacity, transfers of patients to other facilities, and critical staffing shortages. In response to the increased burden on the healthcare systems, Governor Evers announced the opening of the Alternate Care Facility (ACF) at the State Fair Grounds in Milwaukee on October 14th, 2020.

With the rises in positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, Emergency Order #3 has been put in place to help decrease the number of cases and to allow our healthcare systems to be able to operate at full force. Emergency Order #3 limits public gatherings, defined as an indoor event, convening, or collection of individuals, whether planned or spontaneous, that is open to the public and brings together people who are not part of the same household in a single room. Under this order, public gatherings are limited to no more than 25% of the total occupancy limits for the room or building, as established by the local municipality. For indoor spaces without an occupancy limit for the room or building that is established by the local municipality, public gatherings are limited to no more than 10 people.

This order does provide exemptions to the occupancy limits, as these institutions have mitigation measures already in place. The following have been identified as institutions that are exempt from this order:

- Child care settings, before and after school programs, virtual learning support programs, and other child welfare locations listed in the order.
- 4K-12 schools.
- Colleges and universities.

- Health care and public health operations.
- Human services operations, such as long-term care and assisted living facilities.
- Public infrastructure operations, such as food processing and production facilities, airports, construction projects, and public transportation.
- State and local government operations and facilities.
- Religious events, political events, demonstrations, and other events with protected First Amendment speech.
- State facilities under the control of the Wisconsin Supreme Court or the Wisconsin Legislature.
- Federal facilities under the control of the federal government.

“Without a vaccine, the only tools to slow the spread of COVID-19 are wearing a face covering in public, staying at least six feet away from other people when you leave your home, washing your hands regularly, and staying home as much as possible,” said Palm. “Without using these simple but vital life-saving tools, Wisconsin will suffer from unnecessary illness and death.” All of us can help protect the people, places, and experiences that matter most. Taking a few simple steps to stop the spread of COVID-19 reduces the risk – even for young, healthy people – for you and those around you.

A new online form is available for Portage County community members to submit concerns regarding violations of Emergency Order #3. The new form can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3d9Zdb2> and can also be accessed on the Portage County homepage in the “Spotlight” section. Portage County Division of Public Health will receive submitted forms and follow-up appropriately.

The process that the Division of Public Health has created is in line with the guidance from the state and the Department of Justice. We will continue to stress education and outreach on this topic and all other issues related to COVID-19. If enforcement of the order is needed or recommended, those cases may be sent to the District Attorney’s office for review. The best laws are those that never need to be enforced because people are doing what is right for their community.

If you have questions about Emergency Order #3, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is available [here](#).

This is a rapidly evolving situation and we encourage the public to frequently monitor the [Portage County website](#), [Division of Public Health Facebook page](#), and visit the [dashboard](#) for more information. View COVID-19 data for Wisconsin on the [DHS website](#).

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