

'A crisis within a crisis': CDC traces coronavirus as officials warn of spread on city's north side

Mary Spicuzza and Alison Dirr, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Published 9:37 a.m. CT March 27, 2020 | Updated 6:50 p.m. CT March 27, 2020



U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials are in Milwaukee working to study how the coronavirus is transmitted, and state and local officials hope the CDC will be able to help explain the spread of the virus on Milwaukee's north side.

"We are seeing COVID-19 impact in Milwaukee, especially the north side of Milwaukee, in a uniquely bad way," Gov. Tony Evers said during a news conference Friday. "The severity of this disease in the African American community, it's a crisis within a crisis. We must do everything within our power to raise public awareness, ensure access of care and find out why this happens."

The CDC teams are helping with a study about the "secondary attack rate," or the number of cases that occur within the incubation period following exposure to a primary positive coronavirus case.

The CDC team has been working in Milwaukee this week.

Mayor Tom Barrett said he assumed the CDC was in Milwaukee because of the growth in the number of cases here.

"There's no question that we have experienced a very localized, high growth on the north side of the city of Milwaukee," he said. "And we've talked about the reasons — the potential reasons — for that, but I believe and I hope that that's part of the reason that they're coming here."

Barrett said his understanding was that the CDC had sent staff to Wisconsin, Louisiana and Colorado.

The CDC did not respond to requests for comment Thursday and Friday.

Andrea Palm, Wisconsin Department of Health Services secretary, said Friday that members of the CDC had been in Wisconsin "a number of times previously."

Visited on 04/16/2020

"When we had our first case, they did send a few folks to help out," she said. "They sent a few folks into Fond du Lac when we had a little hot spot there, and now a subset of those who were in Fond du Lac are now in Milwaukee helping on the ground there as well as doing some work scientifically."

She said CDC employees have also been working in other places in the country.

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Milwaukee County reported 468 confirmed cases on Friday afternoon.

Wisconsin's pandemic death toll now stands at 15 after doubling in a little more than a day.

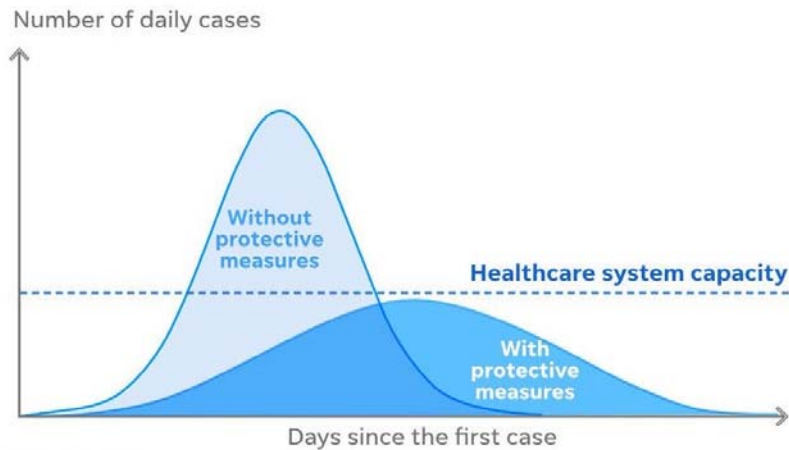
Tests for coronavirus have also increased. By Friday, there had been more than 13,900 tests conducted by the state.

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What it means to ‘flatten the curve’

If left unchecked, infections can generate a large number of cases at the start of an epidemic. This huge spike presents a problem. It means there are many people with the potential to infect many more people. A health care system dealing with this type of threat can easily become overwhelmed. One strategy to counter fast-moving viruses is known as "flattening the curve." In short, limit social interaction and you'll limit viral transmission. With nowhere to go, the virus will spread more slowly, making it easier to manage resources.



SOURCE: CDC

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