



NORTH SHORE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Dear Residents in the North Shore:

In less than two weeks so much of our lives have changed. We are acutely aware of the impacts COVID-19 has had on our community and our daily lives. The seven municipalities of the North Shore are working together through a North Shore Emergency Operations Center to coordinate our response to this pandemic. We are still learning and adapting to this fast pace illness spreading through our communities. Our daily goal is aimed at keeping everyone healthy and safe and to get our lives back to normal as soon as possible.

I recognize some questions have come from the community asking about cases of COVID-19 and our response. I wanted to address two critical ones with this letter with the hope the information clarifies and minimizes confusion for everyone.

How many positive COVID-19 cases are in the North Shore?

Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management has provided this [dashboard map](#) that identifies positive tests in Milwaukee County. This is a useful resource to directly track cases on an ongoing basis. While the dashboard is effective for showing tested case information, it does not relay the challenges with testing and communal spread. Here are the specifics:

- While the map has its benefits, it does not help people understand the message about unofficial cases, given that these are only confirmed positive with a test result.
- The testing criteria for labs like the WI State Lab of Hygiene is set by WI Department of Health. WI DHS has prioritized testing based on those who are critically ill with otherwise unexplained illness and healthcare workers with unexplained illness (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm>). This continues to limit who is tested; therefore, numbers of confirmed positive are lower than the true number of cases.

Moving forward it is important for our communities to understand there are unknown cases who have mild symptoms or are asymptotic altogether. Given the nature of the illness and the limits on our testing capacities, North Shore Health Department (NSHD) recommends proactively isolating at home if you have signs or symptoms for at least 7 days since the symptoms first began AND for at least 3 days after symptoms resolve. Symptoms are generally characterized as cough, shortness of breath, fever, but we are learning more about mild symptoms not presenting with these classic signs. If you feel unwell, isolate at home.



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What is the notification process when someone does test positive?

1. NSHD is notified of cases when they present to us either by a provider alerting us a person is being tested or by a confirmed positive test coming to us through the State's disease reporting system.
2. Unfortunately, with delays in the processing of COVID-19 samples, there are gaps in NSHD being notified. This then feels to the public like the NSHD is slow to notify contacts, but this is the time it takes for the testing and notification process to unfold.
3. To proceed with notification NSHD needs a positive test result and information on the person's contacts so we can reach out to those exposed. The Health Department takes on the role of notification as we are able to assess the level of risk based on the type of situation where the exposure occurred and give direct guidance to those impacted.

This is a fast-moving disease and the positive test results do not account for the number of people who have the disease but won't be tested because they don't meet the criteria. While the positive test cases may appear low, NSHD is confident there are more cases out there. Again, our message is for people to stay home, limit time in public, and take preventative measures like hand washing to prevent further spread of COVID-19 throughout our community.

Thank you to everyone for their support of the NSHD during this unprecedented time. We will continue to connect and share information on our website, through our daily briefings, and through social media.

Be well,

Ann Christiansen
Health Officer/Director