

**Facebook Live Transcription**  
**LIVE: Chippewa County COVID-19 Updates (7.22.2020)**

Angela Weideman:

Good morning. My name is Angie Weideman. I'm the Chippewa County public health director and thank you for joining today. I want to start out by just extending our thoughts and condolences to people who have been impacted by the tornadoes that did touch down in the Chippewa Valley last evening. We, as a health department, helped at the Wheaton tornado cleanup that happened last September, and definitely know that people are impacted by events like this. Just wanted to say that we really especially feel for families and Cadott, where there was a touchdown and a tornado last evening.

Angela Weideman:

We'd like to move into a status update for COVID-19 at the state level and the Chippewa County level. As of yesterday, Wisconsin had 750,562 people that tested negative for COVID-19, 44,134 people have tested positive, 9,369 active cases in the state of Wisconsin, and 33,902 people have been released from isolation. 4,194 people have ever been hospitalized in the state of Wisconsin for COVID-19 and 859 people have died of COVID-19.

Angela Weideman:

Chippewa County has had 6,908 people with negative test results, 171 people have tested positive. And that's an increase of 28 since our last press conference last Wednesday. And 171 of those cases, 36 of them are people who are considered active cases, and 135 are people that are released from public health isolation. We have zero people currently hospitalized and 80 individuals that are over age 40, and 91 people that are under age 40. We currently are at zero deaths in Chippewa County. And in the last week, from July 12th to July 18th, we did have 1,813 tests that were completed. This is an increase of 1,021 tests from the previous week, where we had given 792 tests the week before.

Angela Weideman:

You may notice that our testing went up a lot last week. One of the main reasons for that is that we had mass testing done at a local correctional facility of staff and residents. It is important to test people who are currently incarcerated because they live in a situation where physical distancing is often difficult and an outbreak at a correctional facility would spread the virus very quickly.

Angela Weideman:

Want to talk a little bit about our data and risk level for the community. I would like to provide an update from our local data. After reviewing our 11 indicators and metrics, our current risk level is still at the high level. This means we're recommending gatherings of 15 or fewer in indoor spaces and 50 or fewer in outdoor spaces, while maintaining physical distancing. The physical distancing, including staying home when sick and wearing cloth face coverings, are key to maintaining the spread of the virus.

Angela Weideman:

We also did have a community testing site on Monday, the 20th. Chippewa County Department of Public Health with assistance from the National Guard hosted a COVID-19 community testing site. Testing was available from 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM that day. Overall, the testing ran smoothly and a total of 434 tests were administered. Early on, there was a very large turnout and we worked with the National Guard to request and secure 150 additional tests. It was very important to us that anyone who wanted to be tested was not turned away due to a lack of testing materials.

Angela Weideman:

Community testing events give public health better insight into how widespread COVID-19 is in our community and address issues with access to testing, especially for vulnerable populations. Results from the National Guard events are typically take between three and seven days to get in. We are just starting to get the first results in from that testing event, but we do not have all results in from all 434 tests yet.

Angela Weideman:

We encourage those that were tested to limit the amount of people that they were around until they received their test results. And this is especially important for anyone that had symptoms of COVID-19. We do ask that you wait until you get your testing results back. Close contacts and staying home, if you've been identified as a close contact of somebody with COVID-19, it is important to stay home for 14 days, even if testing negative, or if you aren't experiencing symptoms.

Angela Weideman:

The La Crosse County Health Department shared a great example of why this is important on their Facebook page. Let's just say that we have a gentleman named Greg, and Greg was exposed to COVID-19 and was asked to stay home by the health department. Let's say on day five of a typical 14 day quarantine, Greg gets tested for COVID-19 and the result is negative. On day eight, thinking he didn't have COVID-19, Greg went to a family cookout. He was contagious days eight and nine, 48 hours before symptoms, and exposed 15 family members who then become close contacts. Day 10, he becomes symptomatic and tests positive for COVID-19.

Angela Weideman:

As shown in this case, sometimes people do not have a high enough viral load and may test negative, even if they are tested early on, but may later test positive as their disease progresses and they develop more virus in their body. This is why contact tracing and quarantine are crucial strategies in slowing the spread of COVID-19. That is also why we ask people, if they are tested and test negative and were a close contact to a positive, that they still absolutely need to quarantine until day 14, because they could show positive up to day 14.

Angela Weideman:

And now I would like to introduce Jenny Starck, the superintendent of the Cadott School District. And then I will be back for questions later.

Jenny Starck:

Good morning. Schools in Chippewa County have been busy planning and replanning and planning some more for fall start of school. We meet weekly with public health and all of the districts in the County, just to talk about strategies to maximize safety for students and staff. All of us have three general tiers of instruction that we are working on. Face to face with all students, a hybrid with half of the students in the buildings, half of the students doing distance learning, and then a switch with that, or if we have to do all students distance learning, so that we can be flexible and prepared.

Jenny Starck:

We know that any plans we make today or tomorrow can change based on the data, based on how things are happening, even in our own communities, so we want to be flexible and ready for that. All of us have surveyed our students and our staff. And we're also including the feedback when we make those decisions with the guidance from public health.

Jenny Starck:

As of this date right now, all of our schools are planning to be face to face with all students in the fall. We have increased sanitation stations. We have increased hand washing, increased strategies to help students distance from each other, which includes things like playground, lunchroom. We have strategies for unloading buses to help to separate students as much as possible.

Jenny Starck:

There is some variation and range between our districts. We range from 300 students to over 5,000 students in Chippewa Falls. So what that looks like in each individual school can change from time to time. All of us are planning to keep our students in group cohorts, as much as possible. We're also making changes to our classroom movement and hall traffic to minimize the number of students at a time and the number of students that interact across grade levels. This is going to take some new learning and adjustment on the part of staff, students and families.

Jenny Starck:

One of the other pieces that people are wondering about often is fall sports. We are talking about that, WIAA is talking about that. I believe their board of control has a meeting on July 23rd, where they will discuss fall sports. So those things for most districts have not been completely decided yet. There's some different options that districts and the WIAA are working on to try to keep that as safe as possible.

Jenny Starck:

We do understand this is a very emotional time, an uncertain time for students and staff. Usually the start of the school year has that excitement and the new promise and positivity, and we all look forward to that. We're not going to be able to do the large assemblies with our staff and our students and the kind of welcoming that we typically do, which usually includes a lot of hugging and a lot of all of those things that now we say you shouldn't do. So we're learning new skills. We're working on new strategies and new ways to make everybody feel

connected and feel good relationships without as much of the physical contact. We're anxious to welcome everyone. We're anxious to see students and families and to see them all again this fall. Thank you.

Angela Weideman:

Thank you, Jenny. And we would take any questions.

Speaker 3:

Did you talk much about the event up at the fairgrounds, the results that ... How much do we know about that?

Jenny Starck:

We still are waiting for some test results to come in from the testing. What we do know is that we did give 434 tests. It was a little more packed earlier in the day than it was at the end of the day. Early in the day, it was looking like we were going to run out of test supplies by 5:00 PM, and so, we did ask for an additional 150 test kits for the guard to be able to administer and give. We saw people trickle in at the end of the day and did go over our original 400 test results. We are just starting to get some test results back right now and should have total test results, hopefully, within the next two to three days to be able to give numbers.

Jenny Starck:

At this test site, we did allow asymptomatic individuals to be tested, as well as those with symptoms. And so, I think we did have larger numbers, partially because we opened it up to asymptomatic individuals as well. Hopefully, we will have some data for you on how many tests, what percentage tested were asymptomatic and which percentage tested were symptomatic, as well as we can give the percent positive from that event as well once we have all the results.

Speaker 3:

Has the turnaround time stayed-

Jenny Starck:

The turn around time, so right now, we're two days in from the event and just starting to see some results. It can take three to five days to get all the results back.

Speaker 4:

You said last week, you also had a testing at a correctional facility. Do you have results from that?

Jenny Starck:

Yes. Results have started coming in from that. I have not been able to analyze all of that data yet, but would be happy to get that information to you once I see the total picture. A lot of the results are back for that testing event as well.

Speaker 4:

Okay.

Speaker 5:

Interesting study I saw from UW Health. The mental health of high school kids, testing 300 participants, 65% report anxiety symptoms and 25% with moderate to severe anxiety, a lot of depression and two thirds testing at some level of depressed. Are kids, are they safe just because they are virus-free or is there ... What is the mental health component to this?

Angela Weideman:

That's a great question. What is the mental health component, and specifically, looking at students and especially anxiety being high, depression also being high? Unfortunately, I would say, even pre-pandemic, there were a lot of kids struggling with mental health and I think the pandemic has added to that. I know I was looking at our youth risk behavior survey results and around 47, 48% of middle and high school students said that they had experienced anxiety. What you're referencing shows a larger number, a larger percentage of kids, 65% experiencing anxiety and 25% experiencing anxiety at such a high level that they're really not functioning well.

Angela Weideman:

The pandemic definitely has brought about new anxieties for people. Some people are afraid to leave their homes. Other people are terrified of getting sick and not knowing it and spreading the virus. Some people are afraid just to be in group settings. And so, there's a lot of things, a lot on kids' minds. The other thing that I would say is kids aren't used to seeing a lot of people in masks. And so now, seeing people in masks, they're like, what is going on?

Angela Weideman:

Some parents are very explicit and share a lot of information and some don't. I do think it's good for all parents to check in with their children, just to say, "Is there anything you're thinking about? Is there anything you're worried about? How do you feel about the school year starting?" Just to get kids talking, so that hopefully they're going to share with you what those anxieties are. I think anxiety can be a dangerous thing and it's especially dangerous if somebody is keeping it to themselves and not sharing the anxiety. So if you can get the child to talk about the anxiety, then you can help solve or mitigate that anxiety.

Angela Weideman:

The other thing that I think about a lot is depression, like you mentioned, that anxiety has gone up, depression has gone up. And I would say, it's not just for children. Also the way that adults respond, the way that adults act plays into the way that the child is going to feel. So if adults can definitely be mindful and looking at reputable sources, like CDC, state department of health services, their local health department, limiting the amount of time that they have just the news on in the background. Kids really do pay attention to that, even if they're not sitting in front of it, watching it. So it might be that you're making dinner and the news is on and your child's playing, and you don't really think they're listening, but they are hearing that.

Angela Weideman:

And so, really limiting the amount of time that they are spending on social media, watching the news, and really just getting your information from reputable sources and talking openly with your children are things that will really help reduce that anxiety level.

Speaker 4:

I have a question about schools. You stated that you have three different scenarios, I guess. Person, face to face, half and half, and then all, nobody at school. Could you go into some specifics of will students be wearing masks? Will they be tested? That sort of thing?

Jenny Starck:

Sure. At this time, for all of us, we plan on, we highly recommend masks for students. We are not requiring it. There might be certain situations or certain activities where we are requiring it. I can talk about just in our district, for example, in our secondary choir class, we're talking about face mask for students just because of that activity. So there might be times where that happens, but I think that's a lot of what we're trying to do is limit interaction groups and actually do some education on hand-washing, sanitizing.

Jenny Starck:

It's interesting, as you walk through your buildings with a different lens to think about germs and maybe a different way, just things like having a garbage can near your bathroom door, so if people have a paper towel to open the door, they can toss it in the garbage can. Things that maybe are common sense, but we're actually looking more critically at that as well.

Speaker 4:

And with the three different scenarios, would that be on a week to week basis, just to kind of see?

Jenny Starck:

I mean, it would likely be. I mean, I think one of the things that we are actually working with County health on right now is, even though we say we're trying to be consistent depending on if there are cases identified, it might look like maybe there's just a third grade class that doesn't come for a day or two or ... Our goal would be to let families know ahead of time so they have time for planning, especially if there's some time that students wouldn't be in school, that they would have to have some kind of care that they provide.

Jenny Starck:

All of us, when we're looking at that, we're looking at grouping students by family. So if there are older children in the family, your family's schedule would be the same. But we are. We would like to be able to say, at whatever day, we're going to start, this is this new plan.

Jenny Starck:

The other piece I will say that is a little bit different than maybe it was in the spring is we are talking about, unless schools are shut down by an order or we have the capacity that we feel

like we need to shut them down, even though almost all students are virtual, there may be some students if we're able to, that we would still meet and provide services to. This could especially apply to special education students who might need physical therapy, occupational therapy, things that are really difficult to do virtually. And we want to make sure that as much as possible we can continue to serve their needs.

Jenny Starck:

So even though we talk about it like three distinct categories, there could be some blending in between that, especially when we get between once all students aren't coming, how do we decide ... We have kids just grouped as far as equity that way, but maybe there are some students that might need some additional supports to help them be successful.

Speaker 4:

Is it [inaudible 00:18:52] these plans can never really be set in stone? They always have to be somewhat flexible?

Speaker 3:

They do. I mean, I think maybe three weeks ago, I was more confident that we knew what we were doing and it wasn't going to change. Now, I foresee that it could be, we start on September 1st and on September 10th, we might have to make a change, or in October, or maybe in August and maybe because things are even improving. And so, I think all of the mitigation strategies we have are going to continue no matter what, because that will help us. Even all schools have had difficulties, especially in January, February, with regular flu, influenza, all of those things. So it will help us in all of those areas. Those things were going to continue no matter what.

Speaker 3:

But we are trying to balance the improvements and the structure with still allowing to connect to the mental health. How can kids be kids? You still get to go to recess, but for us, each classroom has their own set of playground balls, their own set of things that they use. We're looking at different colors so you know which ones are yours. And just things like that to try to help increase the safety, but yet still allow kids opportunity to go outside and play and get exercise and be with their friends.

Speaker 4:

I guess, what kind of toll would that take on the school budget?

Jenny Starck:

We're estimating ... I can't give you an exact number at this time, but I can tell you just for PPE, for us, we've ordered a face shield and two cloth masks for every staff member. Some we will have more. We were fortunate enough to get some cloth masks and thermometers from the state that we're able to distribute to students. So even if we're just recommending masks, all students will have an opportunity to get them.

Jenny Starck:

I can tell you, because I just looked at it, it was \$3,000 for the additional sanitizing stations that we put just in our high school and those types of things, plexiglass that we're doing at all of our offices or any desks that might have multiple people coming. And for many of us, it's additional staffing. I mentioned recess. We are sectioning our playground so kids have areas, but they don't run across areas as much. That requires more supervision, so we'll need to add staff to make sure that everybody is safe and include those. And we're also looking at, how do we increase our sub pool if we have an issue where, within our staff, someone has to be quarantined? And how can we best deal with that and still have a good experience for everybody? Thank you.

Angela Weideman:

Wanted to just thank everybody for joining today and for caring about public health. Please remember to use physical distancing, wear a face covering while you're in public, and to wash your hands. Thank you.