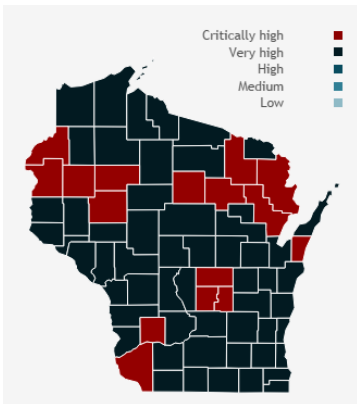October 14, 2021

BAYFIELD COUNTY COVID-19 CASES CONTINUE TO RISE
DESPITE GOOD VACCINATION RATES

Washburn, WI – Bayfield County continues to experience a significant increase in COVID-19 cases despite the good COVID vaccination rates. Bayfield County Health Department has had **38** probable or confirmed COVID-19 cases reported since Monday, October 11th, and is currently listed as "very high" disease case activity level for COVID as of today, Thursday, October 14th. Of the most recent positive COVID cases over the past two weeks, nearly half of all new cases are breakthrough cases – persons who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and become ill with COVID-19 despite vaccination.

WI COVID-19 Disease Activity

"I don't believe residents should see that as a sign that the vaccine is failing to protect persons, but rather as an indicator of disease prevalence in our community," comments Sara Wartman, Bayfield County Health Officer. "The virus is circulating in our community and persons who are fully vaccinated should still take precautions such as wearing a mask or avoiding large gatherings to protect themselves. Being vaccinated against COVID is not carte blanche to resume all normal activities when we see such high levels of community transmission of illness across our County and State."

The COVID vaccines, however, are demonstrating that they are effective against protecting against severe hospitalization and death. A recent trio of studies published in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) demonstrate that after Delta became the most common variant, fully vaccinated people had a fivefold reduced risk of infection (i.e. becoming ill), at least a tenfold reduced risk of hospitalization, and at least a tenfold reduced risk of death. The rate of unvaccinated persons becoming sick, hospitalized, or dying of more serious infections is greater across the U.S. in unvaccinated populations versus vaccinated populations.

"One reason we are seeing higher levels of breakthrough cases in Bayfield County is due to our greater proportion of vaccinated persons. Basically, we have more vaccinated persons than unvaccinated persons for the virus to use as hosts," Wartman continues. "As long as we have unvaccinated persons who do not have naturally acquired immunity from being sick and recovering or who do not gain passive immunity from COVID vaccination, we will continue to see COVID-19 cases in our community."

We are seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases following large gatherings and festivals this autumn. We have known associations between persons attending festivals such as Apple Fest, Cable Fall Festival, Red Cliff Cultural Days and Red Clay Classic who shortly after attending developed symptoms and then tested positive for COVID-19. We also are seeing more cases in schools and associated with childcare centers due to these groups being largely unvaccinated based on their age. For those who are unvaccinated and diagnosed with COVID, we are noticing that they are staying sick longer and with more severe symptoms. Unvaccinated persons are more often requiring medical intervention and pharmaceutical support. Public health recommends early testing for those sick with COVID-like symptoms as early diagnosis is crucial to getting treatment and support.

"If you attended any larger gatherings and develop any COVID-like symptoms, please get tested right away," Heather Neumann, Bayfield County COVID Nurse, urges residents. Area clinics, pharmacies and hospitals are offering COVID testing, in addition to the Wisconsin National Guard testing sites offering COVID testing across northern Wisconsin. "There will be a COVID testing event tomorrow, Friday, October 15th, at the Washburn Highway Garage located at 311 South 1st Avenue East, Washburn, from 11 am – 4 pm. If you have any COVID symptoms at all or have no symptoms but have attended a large gathering or had an exposure to a positive person, drive through tomorrow for a free test," Neumann adds.

Bayfield County Health Department's COVID-19 response staff are urging the community to get vaccinated if they are able, call the Bayfield County COVID Hotline at (715)373-3324 to see if they are eligible for a COVID booster or set up an appointment to get a booster shot, and follow the recommended public health guidance to slow the spread of COVID-19. Current public health recommendations include:

- Wear a mask in public settings with non-household family members.
- Avoid large gatherings.
- Limit unnecessary trips or exposures.
- Physically distance from non-household family members whenever possible.
- Choose outdoor settings for meeting with non-household family members or friends to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Frequently wash your hands and avoid touching your face.
- Monitor your health and stay home if you are feeling unwell.

While the Health Department will attempt to follow-up with individuals who test positive, review isolation recommendations, and determine close contacts, the response may be delayed more than 24 hours due to reporting delays. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, please stay home and isolate (separate from others) immediately for a minimum of 10 days from the start of your symptoms or the date you were tested if you have no symptoms.

If you or a loved one are exposed to someone with COVID-19 you should quarantine (separate from others). Exposure includes being within 6 feet of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for at least a total of 15 minutes cumulative within a 24-hour period or have had physical touch with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Per Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 14 days is the recommended length of time for quarantine for unvaccinated individuals.

Fully vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms. It is recommended to continue to monitor for symptoms for 14 days after last contact, wear a mask indoors, and get tested 3-5 days after exposure. For more information on quarantine timelines, check out How Long Should I Quarantine, a resource provided by Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

For more COVID-19 information, visit our website at www.bayfieldcounty.wi.gov or check the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website at https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm.

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