



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 26, 2020

**ASHLAND AND BAYFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
STRONGLY ADVISE AGAINST PRIVATE GATHERINGS
WITH OVER 25 PEOPLE**

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, Ashland and Bayfield County Public Health are issuing an Emergency Advisory STRONGLY DISCOURAGING non-essential private events or gatherings, especially gatherings of 25 people or more.

Northern Wisconsin is currently experiencing a high level of community spread of COVID-19. From September 1, 2020 to October 1, 2020, Ashland County experienced an increase of over 340% in the number of positive cases. Bayfield County experienced an increase of 150%.

The COVID pandemic region-wide is now overwhelming hospitals across Wisconsin and neighboring states. Medical staff in the hardest hit communities are begging people to stay home and to wear masks in public to reduce the spread of the virus. Healthcare infrastructure and emergency services in rural northern Wisconsin are limited and are posed to be easily strained.

Contact tracing of positive cases reveal infection spread in numerous social settings and public as well as private gatherings. Family get-togethers, birthday parties, sleepovers, as well as memorials and weddings have all resulted in the spread of COVID-19. In spite of efforts to make a bar or restaurant safe, infections are spread wherever people gather to eat or drink indoors.

Due to the local increase in cases attributed to both public and private gatherings or events, Ashland and Bayfield County Public Health are now strongly recommending that citizens decrease the frequency and size of gatherings for the next 14 days starting Monday, October 26, 2020 through Monday, November 9, 2020. Ashland and Bayfield County Public Health recommend that indoor gatherings of non-household family members be limited to 10 people in a space such that physical distancing can be maintained. Face coverings should be worn. Outdoor gatherings should be limited to 25 or fewer individuals with physical distancing and face coverings worn.

“We can do something about this if everybody just stays home,” reports Sara Wartman, Health Officer for Bayfield County. “We are asking our communities to take a two-week pause in normal social activities in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, as hospitals across Wisconsin and Minnesota are seeing a surge in hospitalizations,” Liz Szot, Health Officer for Ashland County.

This advisory excludes: schools and educational facilities, childcare facilities, businesses that are involved in essential services or products, local government offices and operations, healthcare facilities, long-term care facilities or group homes, shelters, political rallies and religious gatherings. All entities are encouraged to keep essential gatherings as small as possible, maintain physical distancing over 6' between attendees, and wear masks.

COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus spread via respiratory droplets and aerosols, by symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals in close contact. Close contact is defined as 15 minutes spent within six feet of an infected individual. Mask use and social distancing help reduce the spread of the virus, but they are not perfect at preventing virus transmission. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the more people a person comes in contact with, as well as the length of time spent with those contacts, the higher the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

Ashland and Bayfield Counties are home to a significant population of individuals most at risk for developing severe illness from COVID-19. We know that this disease is more serious in the elderly or those who have underlying health conditions. However, there is also strong evidence that many otherwise healthy individuals who have only mild COVID-19 disease initially go on to suffer from significant long-term heart, lung, and or neurologic disease.

Remember your COVID-19 prevention strategies:

- Wear a facemask when with non-household members.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Use proper cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Maintain at least 6 feet from non-household members.

Additionally, Public Health now recommends for the next two weeks:

- Avoid sharing vehicles with non-family members if possible.
- Avoid staying overnight at anyone else's home.
- Protect your elderly or medically at-risk family members by visiting outside.
- Avoid eating or drinking indoors anywhere other than your own home. Get takeout from your favorite Friday Night Fish Fry instead of sit-down dining!
- Use curbside delivery for shopping when possible.

This is temporary – we can do this if we work together to keep each other healthy and safe. Don't forget to call on your friends and neighbors to make sure that they are okay. Now is the time to be cautious and protective. Let's get through this together as a community – keeping our businesses open but our friends, family and neighbors safe! Stay healthy and well in Northern Wisconsin!

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