

Blueprint for Reopening Washington and Ozaukee Counties April 20, 2020

The American Enterprise Institution (AEI), a conservative public policy think tank, released a report co-written by former U.S. Food and Drug Administration commissioner Scott Gottlieb. The report outlines a four-phase “road map to reopening.” This blueprint summarizes Phases I and II of AEI’s approach as they pertain to reopening Washington and Ozaukee counties.

AEI’s Approach

- **Phase I: Slow the Spread**
 - This is the current phase of response.
 - Distancing measures will need to be in place until
 - transmission has measurably slowed down, and
 - healthcare infrastructure is scaled up to safely manage the outbreak and care for the sick
- **Phase II: Reopen, State by State**
 - Individual states can move to Phase II when they can effectively diagnose, manage, and isolate all COVID-19 cases and their contacts
 - Some physical distancing measures and limitations on gatherings must remain in place to prevent transmission from accelerating again
- **Phase III: Establish Protection, Then Lift All Restrictions**
 - Physical distancing restrictions can be lifted when we have either
 - broad surveillance and effective medical treatments, or
 - a safe and effective vaccine
- **Phase IV: Rebuild Our Readiness for the Next Pandemic**
 - We must never again be unprepared to face a new infectious disease threat

Our Approach

Governor Tony Evers’ “Safer at Home” order was put into place on March 25, and was extended until May 26. The order was implemented to encourage Wisconsin residents to stay home, practice physical distancing, and avoid all non-essential travel. Since its inception, no guidance has been provided to indicate what the end of this order means for Wisconsin residents. The public deserves a plan to ease and lift restrictions that does not risk the resurgence of the epidemic, resulting in recurring waves of infection and economic depression. This document highlights what should be enacted in order to prevent a potential resurgence.

The Blueprint for Reopening Washington and Ozaukee Counties is a guiding document specifically for Washington and Ozaukee Counties. The Counties are in close proximity to Milwaukee and Chicago. This poses unique challenges, most significantly, increased risk of infection for our residents. The Blueprint is written by the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department and prioritizes the public’s health while recognizing the impact on the economy.

“The presence of disease kills people and the absence of livelihood also kills people,” Emily Bazelon, quoting Amaryta Sen in the New York Times Magazine on Sunday, April 10, 2020.

Phase I: Slow the Spread

The goal of AEI's first phase is to reduce transmission, increase testing, and ensure the health care system can safely treat people. Under this phase, ***stay-at-home orders must be extended to allow time for development of critical infrastructure.*** An extended order would allow health officials to expand diagnostic testing and ramp up contact tracing. It would give hospitals time to build capacity and ensure there are a sufficient number of beds, ventilators for critically ill patients, and appropriate stock of personal protective equipment (PPE). **This pandemic has had a profound impact on the economy; however, it will be far more devastating to our health care system and economy to experience waves of virus resurgence rather than properly return to normal when conditions are safe.**

Maintain Physical Distancing Guidelines

Physical distancing has been marked as one of the key elements to slowing the spread. Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist Dr. Ryan Westergaard, notes that "Without effective treatments or a vaccine, the only way to slow the spread of COVID-19 is through non-pharmaceutical interventions that help us maintain physical distancing." It is estimated that physical distancing has reduced the spread of COVID-19 by 40-50% nationwide.

Expand Testing Criteria

The State of Wisconsin has the capacity to process over 3,000 tests per day; however, testing criteria have limited the number of tests completed statewide to healthcare workers, including first responders, residents of long-term care facilities, and those who are hospitalized or at risk for hospitalization. ***Immediate action should be taken to widen testing criteria in order to accurately identify and track positive cases throughout the community.*** Local health departments would be able to conduct contact tracing on a larger scale and collect data to more accurately demonstrate infection rates.

As of April 2, the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department, through positive case contact tracing, noted the majority of household contacts were also symptomatic. Prior to April 2, close contacts of positive cases were rarely symptomatic. This indicates there are many more cases in the community that have not been tested due to current restrictions. While these restrictions have allowed public health to identify numerous high-risk individuals, they neglect to capture cases of community spread. ***Anyone who is a close contact of a positive case should be tested. At minimum, anyone who is symptomatic should be tested, as well as household members of all positive cases.***

Recently, Seattle took steps to increase testing by sending swabs to randomized households to identify a more accurate number of positive cases. Wisconsin should implement a similar study or a serologic study, when accurate serologic tests are available, through the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health or the Medical College of Wisconsin to better understand the spread throughout the state.

Strengthen Health Care Infrastructure

An extended stay-at-home order with physical distancing guidelines and an expansion of testing criteria would give the health care system much needed time to recover from resource and human capital depletion and rebuild hospital capacity to treat patients. Health care infrastructure needed to continue treating patients safely includes the number of beds, ventilator availability, staff availability and sufficient PPE.

The health care system in Washington and Ozaukee Counties have not been stretched to capacity. However, health care systems and hospitals should anticipate a surge when restrictions are lifted.

Phase II: Reopen Washington and Ozaukee Counties – Incrementally

The COVID-19 pandemic has given way to deep economic challenges, as evidenced by record numbers of unemployment applications. Nationwide, at least 250,000 people die every year from poverty in America because of socioeconomic challenges. Now, in a pandemic, there is an open fissure as the burden of socioeconomic distress will spread.

Stay-at-home orders are needed to dramatically slow the spread of the virus, but we also know it comes with economic costs. However, if we had moved forward without interventions, there would be worse economic consequences. ***An example is the Smithfield pork processing plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Over 350 employees contracted COVID-19, forcing the plant to close indefinitely. If cases and outbreaks increase in businesses, there will be an even greater economic burden.***

In order for our economy to safely recover and thrive, there are several key indicators Washington and Ozaukee Counties must meet before reopening to full capacity. If the process of opening is not done incrementally, the impact could be devastating. Lifting restrictions too soon will put additional stress on the health care system and the economy.

Consistent with the AEI recommendations, to fully reopen Washington and Ozaukee Counties, the following items must be in place (bolded recommendations HAVE NOT been met):

- 1. 14+ days of continuous decreases (downward trend) in statewide case counts and a decrease in hospitalizations,**
2. Hospital capacity and operations back to near normal (beds *and* staff *and* PPE) and patients are treated safely without hospital resorting to crisis standards of care,
- 3. Enough testing capacity to test *everyone* who needs testing, and**
4. Capacity to do contact tracing (active monitoring) on *everyone* who tests positive within 24 to 48 hours.

Officials should also consider the implications of major events and activities, including the upcoming Memorial Day weekend and the 4th of July. Many places throughout Wisconsin will experience a surge in visitors, including Washington and Ozaukee Counties. Increased travel will almost certainly result in a resurgence of positive cases. Other events and activities to consider critically include county fairs and festivals. The State should consider travel limitations within Wisconsin to help curb the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, our communities should proceed with extra caution due to our close proximity to major metropolitan areas, where transmission rates are higher.

Even a gradual loosening of restrictions will result in increased community spread. The actions listed below could be taken now.

Immediate Policy Action

Tests must be available to any Wisconsin resident who requests one.

Primary Actions

1. Recommend PPE (cloth masks) be worn in public.

2. Resume low transmission risk recreation activities.
3. Businesses (including restaurants) can begin internal operations to prepare to reopen with physical distancing restrictions.
4. Individuals who are sick must stay home and contact their healthcare provider for testing.
5. Continue to practice good hygiene and sanitation.

Secondary Actions

Decisions about opening a business or event should be made with consideration of how difficult it is to trace contacts of a positive case. (The more difficult to trace, the more risk is involved.)

1. Schools, Childcare and Summer Camps
 - Summer school and camps should practice physical distancing and stagger offerings throughout the day to decrease number of students who interact.
 - Assess between summer school and camp sessions. If there is an outbreak, postpone or cancel following session until outbreak is resolved.
2. Large Businesses/Corporations/Manufacturing
 - Promote telework options for nonessential employees, promote physical distancing in the workplace, and utilize disinfection guidelines per the CDC.
 - Consider special accommodations for personnel who are members of a vulnerable population.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
3. Small Businesses (Bookstores, Florists, Garden Centers, etc.)
 - Limit the number of patrons in the store at one time.
 - Consider a daily log of individuals who enter.
 - Maintain physical distancing practices.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
4. Retail Stores
 - Limit the number of patrons in the store at one time.
 - Maintain physical distancing practices.
5. Bars, Restaurants and Coffee Shops
 - No more than 10 people per table; tables arranged so that patrons at a given table are at least 6 feet from patrons at any other table.
 - Individuals seated at a bar should maintain 6-foot distance from each other.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
6. Barbers, Hair, Nail Salons and Tattoo Parlors
 - Keep clients at least 6 feet from each other.
 - Practice physical distancing practices.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
7. Vulnerable Populations (e.g., 65+ or underlying medical conditions)
 - Continue "Safer at Home" or sheltering in place until vaccine available.
 - Precautions should be made to isolate vulnerable residents.
 - Visits to Long Term Care Facilities should be prohibited. Health Officer orders should continue to be followed.
8. Social gatherings
 - Limit social gatherings to no more than 10 people.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
9. Parks, Beaches, Golf Courses, Outdoor Recreation Areas (including pools and beer gardens)

- Participants should practice physical distancing.
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
10. Fitness Facilities
 - Adhere to strict physical distancing and sanitation protocols.
 11. Large Venues (Theaters, Sporting Venues, Places of Worship, Museums, Marinas, Zoos)
 - Operate under physical distancing protocols.
 - Maximum seating at 25-50% of capacity.
 12. Shared Rides (Uber/Lyft/busses/etc.)
 - Limit to no more than 10 people per shared ride (applies mainly to busses and shared vans), unless more can be accommodated with 6-foot minimum spacing (some buses).
 - Assess at 2 week intervals.
 13. Festivals, Fairs, Concerts and Parades
 - Summer events with large numbers of attendees should consider cancellation or postponement.
 14. Business Travel
 - Minimize non-essential travel.
 15. Farmers Markets
 - Resume open-air Farmer's Markets.
 - Practice physical distancing.
 - Communities should consider spreading vendors out over a larger area.
 16. Common Areas
 - Common areas in any setting, where personnel are likely to congregate should be closed.
 17. Similar considerations may need to be implemented in other sectors.

Ideal Public Health Actions

1. Officials should adhere to the "Safer at Home" order.
 - Under the order, residents should continue to practice physical distancing.
 - Schools should remain closed for the remainder of the Spring 2020 session.
 - Businesses/Employers should promote telework options for nonessential employees, promote social distancing in the workplace, and utilize disinfection guidelines per the CDC.
 - Long-term care facilities should continue to limit visitors and follow orders set forward by local health departments.
 - Residents should limit unnecessary travel (domestic and international).
2. Expand testing and contact tracing.
 - Increase testing capacity and conduct active monitoring of all cases.
 - All close contacts of a positive case should be tested within 24 to 48 hours. At minimum, anyone who is symptomatic should be tested, as well as household members of all positive cases, as well as essential workers who need to return to work after illness.
3. Strengthen health care infrastructure.
 - Ensure there are a sufficient number of beds.
 - Ensure there are a sufficient number of ventilators for critically ill patients.
 - Restore stock of personal protective equipment.
 - Assure sufficient staffing levels to manage potential resurgence.
4. General Public
 - Wear cloth face covering when outside the home to the extent feasible.

- Continue to keep 6 feet distance from others to the extent feasible.

Additional Considerations when Safer at Home Expires

Without a plan and clear benchmarks for when restrictions can be eased, we will see a second wave of positive cases.

- What plans are in place to address the likely surge of positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths?
- Will public and private gatherings of people that are not part of a single household or living unit be allowed? If so, how COVID-19 infection be mitigated?
- If public schools reopen, how will students, faculty, and staff be kept safe from COVID-19?
- If businesses, from restaurants to manufacturing plants, are to open, how will new outbreaks be managed?
- As COVID-19 easily spreads through long-term care facilities, jails, prisons, and other congregate living facilities, will state and local government continue to play a role in reducing the number of COVID-19 outbreaks and infections in such facilities?
- What will the state government do to enhance local and statewide testing and contact tracing?
- Are there safety measures to protect tenants who have been impacted financially once the 60-day eviction and foreclosure ban ends?