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Press Release: Due to Increased Hospitalizations in the Fox Valley, Gov. Evers Announces Wisconsin State Fair Park Alternate Care Facility to Accept COVID-19 Patients October 14

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Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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Record COVID-19 surges throughout the state increases pressure on Wisconsin health systems

MADISON — Due to increased COVID-19 hospitalizations and at the request of hospital systems, Gov. Tony Evers announced today the Alternate Care Facility (ACF) at Wisconsin State Fair Park will begin accepting COVID-19 patients within the next week. The announcement comes as Wisconsin health systems experience rising pressure to manage record surges in COVID-19 patient hospitalizations. As of yesterday, there were 853 COVID-19 hospitalizations, an increase of 71 over the day before.

“We hoped this day wouldn’t come, but unfortunately, Wisconsin is in a much different, more dire place today and our healthcare systems are beginning to become overwhelmed by the surge of COVID-19 cases,” said Gov. Evers. “This alternative care facility will take some of the pressure off our healthcare facilities while expanding the continuum of care for folks who have COVID-19. I want to thank the many frontline healthcare workers and first responders who are caring for our most vulnerable COVID-19 patients and I

urge all Wisconsinites to step up to help these folks by staying home as much as possible so we can flatten the curve, prevent hospitalizations, and save lives.”

“Our hospital system is strained and in some areas of the state reaching capacity and at risk of being overwhelmed,” said Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. “And as COVID-19 cases rise, hospitals across the state are experiencing critical staffing shortages – largely due to staff members experiencing infection or exposure to the virus in their communities. This is why we need every Wisconsinite to follow our recommendations and take this seriously. When hospitals are at capacity, it doesn’t matter if you need care because of COVID-19 or a heart attack. We have to disrupt transmission so Wisconsinites can get the care they need.”

Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases in September hospitals are now overwhelmed and fear reaching capacity. The state is divided into seven healthcare emergency readiness coalition regions (HERC regions), which coordinate how public health, healthcare institutions, and first responder agencies respond to health emergencies and catastrophic events. As of today, 7 HERC regions (Fox Valley Area, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, South Central, Southeast, Western) exhibit 'High' or 'Very high' activity.

As COVID-19 cases rise, hospitals across the state are experiencing critical staffing shortages – largely due to staff members experiencing infection or exposure to the virus. Wisconsin is seeing these current and imminent staff shortages in every HERC region. On September 7, there were 289 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in Wisconsin. One month later, hospitalizations have nearly tripled with 853 patients hospitalized across the state and more than quadrupled in the Fox Valley, Northeast, Northwest, Northcentral, and Western regions of the state. Hospital leaders in Green Bay, Appleton, Neenah, and Wausau are reporting ICUs at capacity, transfers of patients to other facilities, and critical staffing shortages, and at their urging Gov. Evers will open the Alternative Care Facility.

This alternative care facility is not a hospital and will not accept walk-in patients. The facility will coordinate with healthcare systems to admit patients who still need care but are not seriously ill in need of hospital-level care. It will serve as a transitional facility to offer oxygen and medical care for COVID-19 patients who still need support in their recovery. The goal of this facility is to transition COVID-19 patients who are less ill out of hospitals and reserve hospital beds for patients who are more ill and in need of hospital-level care.

Details regarding the use of the facility, as well as facility staffing levels, will be available in the coming days. General background information regarding the ACF at Wisconsin State Fair Park is available [here](#).

ACF Background

In April, Gov. Evers announced construction of the Wisconsin State Fair Park ACF as a critical extension of healthcare systems in the southeast region and across our state. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers signed a contract with Gilbane Milwaukee and several Wisconsin sub-contractors, including HGA (Design), Johnson Controls, Staff Electric, F. Ahern, and Hetzel Sanfillipo, to assist in construction. The ACF is a low-acuity facility that is part of a continuum of care provided to Wisconsin residents in response to the pandemic. The facility currently has 530 patient spaces, of which 296 include in-line oxygen care in a non-traditional, temporary environment. Funding for the ACF will come from the \$445 million surge reserve fund set aside by Gov. Evers to ensure the ability of Wisconsin hospital systems and communities to handle a surge of COVID-19 cases. The state’s testing needs are anticipated to exceed the original \$260 million budget by up to an additional \$270 million, which is also being covered by the reserve fund. These response programs are funded with the federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund, which only allows activities to be funded through the end of 2020. Without additional federal action, these critical CRF operating dollars for the ACF and the state’s testing program will not be available as of January 1.

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