

Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions

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To our partners in Wisconsin Tourism,

Governor Evers has recently extended Wisconsin's Safer at Home order until May 26. We, as Wisconsin citizens and business owners, deserve to know, understand and review the scientific information and data upon which his decision was based. This decision cannot be based on politics. There is too much at stake for the State of Wisconsin, both in terms of public health and the economic health of our State. Because the Governor did not provide us with his scientific analysis, I am left to reviewing the science that has been developed and is available publicly.

Current models project that Wisconsin, with a population of a little more than five million people, will have somewhere between 300 and 600 deaths. The current projection is around 350 deaths and any loss of life is tragic. These numbers have dropped substantially from earlier projections as more information is being gathered not only in the United States but across the world as well.

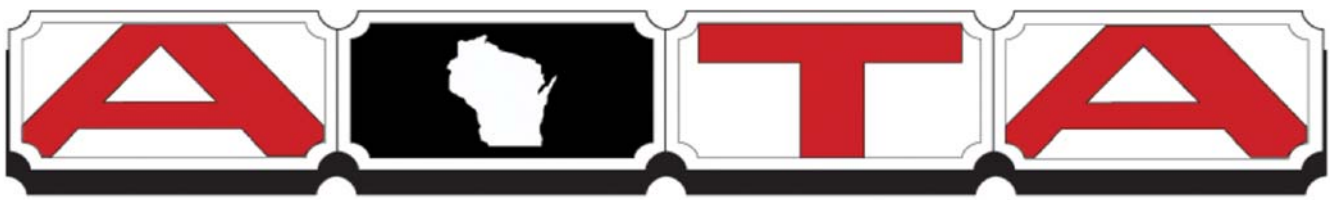
In addition, while the COVID-19 virus is highly transmissible and is deadly to those who contract a serious case with respiratory difficulties, the mortality rate is likely much lower than originally feared, especially for the young and healthy. This is due to the likelihood that actual infections are significantly greater than reported infections, as many people who contract the virus are either asymptomatic or have mild symptoms that didn't necessitate a test. This has been shown to be true in some early studies.

Stanford University, University of Bonn in Germany and Mass General Hospital in Boston all recently conducted blood tests on sample populations from infected regions to see who has COVID-19 antibodies, which means they have the virus or already had it. The estimates from these early studies indicate that there may be between 10-80 times more people who have been infected than the number of reported infections. If this data proves accurate through peer-review and further study, it would imply a mortality rate from COVID-19 that is similar to or slightly higher than the seasonal flu, not many multiples of it as originally feared.

While this doesn't reduce the need to continue to shelter our vulnerable and remain cautious with our personal hygiene, it does hold promise for allowing businesses and workers to begin returning to their lives in an intelligent and phased manner.

Wisconsin's extended shutdown is proving to be punishing for the private sector and it risks causing serious instability to our society. Over 385,000 Wisconsin residents have lost their jobs in the last four weeks, with the entire loss coming from the 1.9 million private sector jobs in Wisconsin. This is a 20% reduction in jobs coming from the private sector work force. I am certain this week's unemployment numbers will add dramatically to these numbers, as business owners are now faced with the fact that they cannot open before May 26.

The public sector jobs in Wisconsin number approximately 300,000 and virtually none of the State's current job losses came from the public sector. Sadly, some of these public sector staff are the same people who are making the decisions that affect the private sector and its loss of jobs. These decision makers feel none of the pain that the rest of the State is experiencing.



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I am not making light of the situation we are in and Governor Evers acted quickly and responsibly in enacting the initial Safer at Home order, set to expire on April 23. And while 350 mortalities in Wisconsin to COVID-19 is still 350 too many, I believe that losing 385,000+ jobs and experiencing huge business failures by keeping Wisconsin shuttered is not the way to go and will have devastating consequences, including negative health implications of those who remain unemployed.

There is a logical and safe way to open the Wisconsin economy without continuing down this destructive path. We can protect our vulnerable by keeping them safe at home. We can take current CDC recommendations and have people wear masks when they are out and about. We can put together the best and brightest minds in our state to come up with reasonable and safe standards for a reopening.

It is interesting to note that the essential businesses that were allowed to remain open came up with their own best practices for confronting COVID-19, without State mandates. The food supply chain is working remarkably well. Walmart, Costco and all of the major grocery chains and independent operators have put in place sound safety measures to help prevent the spread of the virus. They did this with little or no direction from the State. Everyone who has shopped for food and supplies knows exactly to what I am referring. Personal responsibility goes a long way in controlling the spread of this virus. Other business sectors can do the same, if given the opportunity.

To make the announcement to extend Wisconsin's shutdown until May 26 without having a well thought out plan on how to reopen, to me, is irresponsible and destructive. Governor Evers must immediately create a task force made up of private sector individuals and knowledgeable health officials to create a comprehensive phased plan that addresses an orderly and safe restart of our economy. If we wait until May 26 to start this process, we run the risk of permanently destroying Wisconsin's economy and the loss of thousands of small businesses. We don't have the luxury of waiting – time is of the essence.

Thank you,

Tom Diehl
President, Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions

Affiliations

President, Tommy Bartlett, Inc.
Board Member, Wisconsin Dells Visitor and Convention Bureau
Board Trustee, Village of Lake Delton
Board Member, Bank of Wisconsin Dells