



Washburn County Health Department

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COVID-19: Herd Immunity and the Dangers of COVID Parties

Amidst the national news coverage of COVID-19 have been several stories documenting what have been dubbed “COVID parties.” COVID parties are gatherings where individuals intentionally expose themselves to COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) with the intention of contracting the virus. The theory behind COVID parties is loosely based on “chickenpox parties,” prevalent prior to the development of the varicella vaccine, where parents brought their kids together to play with an infected child so that their own child would contract it.

Whether these parties are happening as intentional gatherings to attempt exposure to COVID-19 or are simply ill-advised parties where an infected person unknowingly brings the virus as an unwanted guest is still up for debate on a case-by-case basis. While we hope that individuals would not knowingly expose themselves and others to a virus that is 100 times more lethal than chickenpox and, at its lowest current estimates, at least 6 times more lethal than influenza, here are just some of the reasons why you should absolutely **not** attend or host a COVID party:

- 1. Infection may not guarantee long-term immunity.** Many questions remain about immunity after recovering from a COVID-19 infection. Scientists are still unsure about if infection protects against reinfection and, if it does, how long that protection exists.¹ Johns Hopkins School of Public Health suggests that if the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 is similar to other coronaviruses, like the common cold, it is possible that people who recover from infection will be immune for a period of time, but not forever. Recent studies have found that the level of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 have decreased within the first months since infection.^{2,3}
- 2. Infection can cause long-term damage for patients of all ages.** Multiple studies have found that in cases requiring hospitalization, long-term effects on adults who survive these severe infections include pulmonary, neurologic, and cardiovascular damage, including stroke.^{4,5,6,7} Common symptoms of the virus can persist immediately following recovery, including fatigue, chest discomfort, and shortness of breath.⁸ In mild cases, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 35% of symptomatic adults had not returned to their usual state of health 2-3 weeks after testing positive and among health 18-34 year olds, one in five had not returned to their usual state of health.⁹ Children who contract the virus are at risk of developing multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) which can cause severe cardiac-related symptoms and damage to several other organ systems.^{10,11}
- 3. People may not adhere to quarantine requirements.** Close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases must quarantine for fourteen days after their last exposure, which is the duration of the incubation period for SARS-CoV-2. Individuals who expose themselves to COVID-19 could develop mild or asymptomatic cases of the virus and unknowingly spread the virus to others. Even those who are asymptomatic or have mild cases can transmit the virus to others who may be at higher risk and could become seriously ill or die.
- 4. There is no cure for COVID-19.** While there have been some promising treatments found for critically ill COVID-19 patients, there is no solid treatment that is guaranteed to prevent death. There are also no treatments currently in use for mild to moderate cases of COVID-19 to reduce the infection time or prevent long-term damage from occurring. In the world of medicine, it is unethical to knowingly expose individuals to a virus for which there is no treatment or cure that can prevent death.

5. **Herd immunity is extremely unlikely without a vaccine.** According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, in order to achieve herd immunity, at least 70% of the population would need to be immune to SARS-CoV-2. Based on the current pace of infections in the US, it would take us well into 2021, if not later, to reach the necessary percentage of infections. This method of attempting herd immunity would also result in at least 500,000 Americans dying from COVID-19, based on the current daily death rate. This does not take into account the emerging research suggesting that immunity wanes over time after infection, mentioned previously.
6. **Rapid increases in infections threaten our healthcare system.** “Flatten the Curve” was designed with the idea that by reducing the frequency of infections, we could spread out the number of people needing medical care and prevent our health systems from being overwhelmed by a surge in patients. If everyone were to be infected at once, our healthcare infrastructure would be put under considerable pressure.

Intentionally contracting COVID-19 can cause numerous unintentional consequences both for the individual and for the community. Washburn County residents and businesses have made sacrifices and worked hard to prevent the spread of the virus in our community. Attending gatherings poses a high risk of exposure to the virus, whether intentional or unintentional. We urge the community to continue working to protect the health of our friends, families, and neighbors and ensure our businesses can safely operate as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Visit <https://www.co.washburn.wi.us/news/public-health/Coronavirus-Outbreak> for up-to-date information and Washburn County testing information by provider. Questions can be directed to the Health Department at 715-635-4400 or by email to health@co.washburn.wi.us