



## Winnebago Lutheran rallies past Laconia for fourth straight win

SPORTS, 1D

# THE REPORTER

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2021 | FDLREPORTER.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

## Struggling to breathe

GETTY IMAGES

### Wisconsin's pediatric ICUs are unusually full because of non-COVID respiratory viruses

Madeline Heim USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

It may still be the tail end of summer, but inside the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's Wisconsin hospital in Milwaukee, it feels like winter already. • There, many infants and young children are hospitalized with illnesses that have them struggling to breathe. • Most of them don't have COVID-19, but things like respiratory syncytial virus or parainfluenza, which are more prevalent than usual for this time of year. • In most adults, viruses like RSV aren't a big deal, said Dr. Michael Meyer, who's the medical director of the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's Wisconsin and professor of pediatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

For them, it causes mild, cold-like symptoms. But for young children, who have smaller airways that are more easily blocked by mucus, it can be serious.

Summer patients in pediatric intensive care are usually there for surgical procedures while they're out of school, chronic medical conditions or trauma-related injuries, like those suffered in a car crash.

Right now, Meyer said, his hospital is admitting six to 12 infants per day with severe respiratory disease, at least three times what normal patient volumes would be. Many of these patients are staying longer, too.

Southern states are meanwhile seeing their pediatric ICUs fill with children infected by the more contagious delta variant of

COVID-19. Children now account for more than a quarter of new cases nationwide, according to a Sept. 9 report from the American Academy of Pediatrics, and as more children get the virus, more will be hospitalized with it.

Could a similar surge in child cases be in store for Wisconsin? Meyer says our higher overall vaccination rate may save us from the worst of what the south is experiencing — but his hospital staff, already fatigued by the pandemic, is likely to stay busy for a while.

"I'm really worried that as we see more and more children infected with COVID — and that's what we're seeing — we're going to continue to see high volumes of children moving through," he said.

#### RSV, other viruses likely high because of an immunity backlog

Just before the rise of COVID-19, the 2019-20 flu and respiratory virus season hit Wisconsin hard. At Children's, Meyer said, it was the busiest the hospital had been with RSV cases.

Since Children's Wisconsin in Milwaukee is the biggest of the handful of pediatric intensive care units in the state — at 72 beds, it's one of the largest in the nation — most Wisconsin kids with infections severe enough that they need to be hospitalized are coming there.

"We opened up more ICU beds for the

See BREATHE, Page 5A

### Fond du Lac County passes 14,000 COVID-19 cases

Daphne Lemke Fond du Lac Reporter  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

FOND DU LAC - The Fond du Lac County Health Department reported 413 new positive COVID-19 tests since last Friday, according to its Community Impact Dashboard.

As of Saturday afternoon, the county's total positive case count since the pandemic began, was up to 14,319 — an increase from 13,886 the week before —

and active cases are at 629 in the county, with 11 of those currently hospitalized.

Tuesday's daily number was the highest in several months with 109 new cases reported.

To date, 13,553 people have been released from isolation measures and the department has recorded 178,231 negative tests — an increase of 3,923 since the week before.

The total number of virus-related

deaths in the county is 138, as reported to The Reporter by the county health department.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks the county's transmission status as high.

The Safe Restart metrics report, updated on Mondays, shows number of cases and contact tracing both in the red "of concern" status.

The criteria looking at county hospitals' ability to care for patients without

going into crisis standards, testing and personal protective equipment availability are in the green "excellent" status.

Vaccine distribution is up to 50,543 county residents age 12 and older with at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine as of Friday, which is 48.9% of the county population, according to state data.

See COVID-19, Page 5A

USA TODAY

Afghanistan: After withdrawal, U.S. seeks NATO basing, intelligence pacts. 1B

The Reporter & fdlreporter.com

Reaching more than 50,000 adults weekly. Serving the Fond du Lac area since 1870.

Weather

High 87° | Low 71°  
Sunny. Forecast, 6B

Volume 152 | No. 24  
Home delivery pricing inside  
Subscribe 877-424-5040  
©2021 \$2.50



# Breathe

Continued from Page 1A

first time than I'd ever seen," he said of the 2019-20 flu season.

Data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services show more than 36,000 flu cases reported that season, leading to more than 4,400 hospitalizations and 183 deaths — including three children. The state also reported its highest-ever number of pregnant and postpartum people hospitalized with the flu.

In the thick of it — the week ending Feb. 15, 2020 — the state health department also reported 363 RSV cases, although its weekly respiratory viruses report doesn't specify how many were in adults and in children.

Flip the calendar a year forward and the data looks very different. As the pandemic drove us inside, the health department reported just two cases of RSV in the week ending Feb. 13, 2021.

By May, when the flu season typically ends, there had been zero flu deaths — of any age — in Wisconsin. There were five RSV cases that week.

But in the most recent respiratory report, from Sept. 4, 512 Wisconsinites that week had tested positive for RSV.

The 2020-21 lull is likely the reason that a rush of cases is happening now, Meyer said. As families stayed inside and avoided gathering with others to ward off COVID-19, many schools went virtual, and large events were canceled. Viruses lost all their regular avenues to infect young children.

Thus, babies born over a year ago and babies born in the past year all began to get exposed at the same time when the world opened back up earlier this spring and summer.

Meyer said it's likely not so much an early start to the 2021-22 respiratory virus season as a late burst of the previous year's season.

Now, "the real risk is this just continues through the winter," Meyer said.

That would be made worse if COVID-19 infections in children keep increasing.

Dr. Ryan Westergaard, chief medical officer and state epidemiologist for communicable diseases in Wisconsin,

shared that concern in a news briefing with reporters in mid-August.

Westergaard called it an "unusual environment" for childhood infections with RSV cases on the rise, pointing to fuller pediatric intensive care units, and said a rise in COVID-19 hospitalizations could make things worse.

"That adds some urgency to the precautions we must take to prevent transmission from reaching our schools and other settings," Westergaard said then.

## Pediatric hospitals are doing OK, but COVID could strain them

Evidence is mixed on whether the delta variant of COVID-19 is more severe for children, but one thing is certain: It's infecting many more of them.

The original strain of the virus appeared to affect children less severely than adults, bringing relief to parents and families. In Wisconsin, state health department data show that only 2% of COVID-19 cases among residents 0-19 required hospitalization, versus an overall rate of 5% for all age groups. Just three residents 19 or younger have died of the virus — none under 10.

But with delta, the number of children in the U.S. testing positive for the virus per week has grown nearly 30 times, from about 8,400 per week in June to more than 243,000 the week of Sept. 9, according to American Academy of Pediatrics data, the most ever.

When more children are infected, the number of them who need to be hospitalized for severe disease grows, and it has had hospitals in southern states sounding the alarm.

Children's hospitals in Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas, among others, have said their facilities were overwhelmed with the influx of COVID-19 patients. On Aug. 26, a group of more than 220 children's hospitals wrote to President Joe Biden asking him to take steps to support pediatric hospital capacity or risk insufficient space and staff to care for their young patients.

Like elsewhere, Wisconsin's child COVID-19 cases are increasing. From June through the end of August, cases in residents under 18 were growing the fastest compared to other age groups, state health department data show. But

it hasn't yet resulted in a sharp uptick of hospitalizations because of the virus.

A spokesperson for Children's Wisconsin reported that the number of kids in the hospital who'd tested positive for COVID-19 doubled from eight to 16 from May to July, but noted some had been hospitalized for other reasons and just happened to test positive.

Although children under 12 aren't yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, Meyer said Wisconsin kids might see broader protection from a state with a higher vaccination rate than some in the south.

A New York Times analysis found that the 10 most vaccinated states had relatively flat COVID-19 hospital admissions for youth, while childhood admissions in the 10 least vaccinated states had climbed. Wisconsin ranks 22nd in the nation for its percentage of fully vaccinated residents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Meyer said his hospital hasn't seen many severe COVID-19 cases where kids have had to be placed on a ventilator, but he worries that could change, particularly if safety protocols such as masking continue to loosen as kids head back to school and extracurricular activities.

Because Children's was fresh off the flu season he called the busiest in history when the pandemic began, he's not so much worried about having enough space if respiratory hospitalizations continue to rise. They've had practice with that.

Rather, it's about the hospital's workforce being depleted — a story shared at nearly every medical facility across the country right now.

"The risk is, we've had a lot of people that have been impacted by COVID. Either they've had it, they know someone who has had it, their kids have been out of school ... that's caused a whole deal of stress in the health care field," Meyer said.

"We're confronting many sick children with health care providers who have worked really hard."

While kids under 12 await a COVID-19 vaccine, Meyer said it will be especially important to get them their flu vaccine this year to ward off at least one type of respiratory virus.

Contact reporter Madeline Heim at 920-996-7266 or mheim@gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter at @madeline\_heim.

# COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

Of those, 47,419 people — or 45.9% of the population — are fully vaccinated.

Free, weekly mobile testing will launch Tuesday in Rosendale and Thursday in Fond du Lac for county residents ages 2 and older. The launch date was originally scheduled for this week, but was delayed due to technology challenges.

A mobile unit from Accelerated Clinical Laboratories will offer tests from noon to 5 p.m. Tuesdays at the Rosendale Community Center, 211 N. Grant St., Rosendale; and from noon to 5 p.m. Thursdays at the Fond du Lac County Fairgrounds, 520 Fond du Lac Ave., Fond du Lac.

The two tests being offered are rapid antigen tests, which will give results in 15 minutes; and PCR confirmatory tests, which will give results in one to two days.

Symptoms are not a requirement for the mobile testing, and appointments, insurance or identification are not necessary.

Additionally, Agnesian HealthCare is testing symptomatic community members. Anyone with even minor symptoms

is encouraged to call 920-926-8400 for testing information.

More information on testing and vaccines is available at fdlco.wi.gov.

## Dodge County COVID-19 numbers increase to 'tipping point' levels

Dodge County Public Health has announced 13,181 total cases as of Saturday afternoon, according to the COVID-19 Daily Snapshot.

Community members account for 10,836 of the cases, and 577 of those are considered active. Virus-related deaths are at 213.

The county risk level is at 38.41 new cases per 100,000 residents, placing it in the red "Tipping Point" category.

In addition to community members, the total case count includes cases within the county's three correctional institutions, though no inmates at Waupun Correctional Institution, Dodge Correctional Institution or Fox Lake Correctional Institution have currently active cases.

According to Friday's state numbers, Dodge County has reported 47,025 total negative tests.

Contact Daphne Lemke at 920-907-7968 or dlemke@gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter at @daphlemke.

## GET A NEW KITCHEN IN DAYS, NOT MONTHS.

**DONE IN 1-5 DAYS**



**Transform Your Kitchen In Just 1 to 5 Days**

Kitchen Tune-Up offers five different ways to quickly and affordably update or replace your cabinets. We can change the color or style of your cabinets - or both! With financing options as low as \$99 - \$249 per month. Contact us today to request a free design consultation & quote!

**kitchentune-up®**  
Bobby & Ashley Kuhns

Appleton, Green Bay, Oshkosh Central Wisconsin  
**920.968.5887 715.445.5887**

[kitchentuneup.com](http://kitchentuneup.com)  
Each franchise is locally owned and operated.

1 Day Tune-Up • Cabinet Painting • Redooring • Refacing • Custom Cabinets

# This Treat ain't no Trick!

**14" Laptop  
Intel i3 Processor  
4GB Memory  
128GB SSD  
Windows 10  
(in S-mode)**

**\$279**

While Supplies Last! SKU: 597835 **For only**

**Shop Local Milwaukee PC**  
The People Behind The Product - Since 1989

**512 S. Military Rd., Fond du Lac  
920-924-6192**

White Supplies Last. See store for full details. Windows 10 S-Mode is a special mode of Windows that is streamlined and increases security for safe browsing. Ad required for discount.

# BACK to School FDL

*A community-wide collaboration*

# THANK YOU!

Many thanks to the individuals, organizations, businesses and religious organizations that came forward to help make this community project such a success.

Your efforts made a difference in the lives of local children!







## YOU CAME THROUGH!

# OVER 1,270 STUDENTS

## STARTED 2021 READY TO LEARN

**145 VOLUNTEERS** served  
**764 HOURS** to make this possible.