



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Department on Aging

MILWAUKEE COUNTY DEPARTMENT ON AGING UPDATE IN RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Issued: June 24, 2020

A number of questions have recently come up regarding Milwaukee County's plan to re-open the five county-owned senior centers. We want to provide you with an update on the County's plan and the reasoning behind these decisions.

As you know, older adults are a high-risk group for severe illness. The risk of spreading COVID-19 is heightened when people are interacting with one another, especially indoors. While there are many steps the County and individuals can take to mitigate risks, at this point in time there is no way of making our senior centers sufficiently safe to serve high-risk older adults. Furthermore, leading public health experts across the County expect that there will be a drastic second spike of COVID-19 as early as this summer, and almost certainly by the fall that will last well through flu season 2021. While we don't know when a treatment or vaccine may be developed and available to the public, experts largely agree that this will not happen for at least 12 months. For these reasons, **we expect to keep the senior centers closed for older adult programming through at least March 2021.**

Key Factors in This Decision

- COVID-19 is a highly infectious, deadly virus and the County must prioritize the safety and health of our service users.
- Older adults are a high-risk group and we cannot make programming at senior centers safe enough to open while Milwaukee County is experiencing community spread of COVID-19.
- What does it mean that older adults are "high risk"?
 - People 65+ have higher incidence of serious illness leading to hospitalization or even death.
 - People over age 65 make up 15% of the population but usually around 40% of hospitalizations. In other words, people 65+ are disproportionately represented in hospitalized groups.
- Milwaukee has been experiencing community spread of COVID-19 since early 2020, and when the flu season makes its expected return in the fall there is the risk of not one, but two viral outbreaks that hit some age groups harder than others. Some flu seasons disproportionately affect seniors and we already know that COVID-19 hits older adults harder.
- Flu season typically runs from October through March but can sometimes last longer. At this time, Milwaukee County does not expect to be able to open senior centers for older adult programming any earlier than March 2021. If a treatment or vaccine is developed and available to the public, the County will re-visit the timeline for opening its senior centers.

- Meeting the needs of our older adult population is of utmost importance to us. The Department on Aging and its service providers continue to provide and coordinate services to older adults, and the Department updates its website daily with any service changes.

If something drastically changes what we currently know about the spread of the virus, we will re-evaluate opening senior centers accordingly.

Stay Connected

For the latest updates on MCDA services and response to COVID-19 please go to our website:

<https://county.milwaukee.gov//EN/Department-on-Aging/Coronavirus-Updates>