

News From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

COVID-19 Precautions Helped Limit Cases Linked to Milwaukee Primary

High rates of voting by mail and other prevention strategies during Milwaukee's April primary limited the election-related spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), according to a [report](#) by CDC and City of Milwaukee Health Department researchers.

Wisconsin's primary election occurred 2 weeks after the state issued its stay-at-home order, making it the first state in the country to have in-person voting during a lockdown. To help reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2 among voters, the CDC in early March published interim [guidance](#) for polling places. The City of Milwaukee implemented some of the [measures](#), such as encouraging absentee or early voting to help reduce crowds. Poll workers were provided with protective equipment and training. The city also implemented physical distancing measures and frequent surface disinfection at polling sites. In-person voters were urged to wear face masks and frequently wash their hands.

During the election, absentee voting increased 15-fold as 68% of voters mailed in ballots compared with 4.1% in 2016. Early voting also increased from 4.7% to 12.2%. The 19.8% of voters who cast a ballot in

person on election day faced long lines and wait times due to the number of Milwaukee polling sites being reduced from 181 to 5, according to news [reports](#).

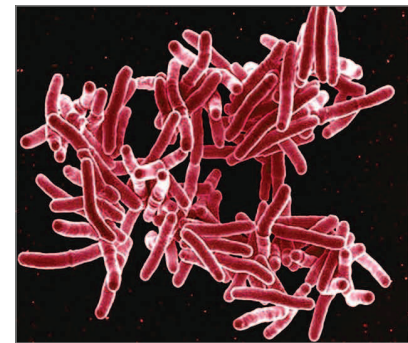
No increase in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases was reported 2 to 14 days after election day, when symptoms would have been expected to appear. Only 37 of the 572 people diagnosed with COVID-19 in the postelection symptom window reported voting, including 14 who voted in person.

"No clear increase in cases, hospitalizations, or deaths was observed after the election, suggesting possible benefit of the mitigation strategies, which limited in-person voting and aimed to ensure safety of the polling sites open on election day," the authors wrote. Additional measures such as longer voting periods and more polling sites may further reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission during upcoming elections, they noted.

TB Control Suffers During Pandemic

Extraordinary demands during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have diminished efforts to diagnose and treat people with tuberculosis (TB) at half of US public health departments, according to a [report](#) by the CDC and the National TB Controllers Association.

After the first US case of COVID-19 was reported in late January, public health departments nationwide began to redeploy personnel from TB control programs to the COVID-19 response. To assess the effects of the reassignments, the CDC in April contacted 50 of the 61 programs that receive CDC funds through TB Elimination and Laboratory cooperative agreements. Eleven programs couldn't be reached because of staff redeployments for COVID-19.



Of those who responded, 60% to 72% reported a partial or high impact on staff capacity for TB services: 52% diagnosed and treated fewer patients with TB, 68% described reduced diagnosis and treatment of latent TB infections, and 64% had less resources for contact tracing.

During the National TB Controllers Association's monthly webinars in March and April, most of about 40 members who responded to real-time text questions indicated that staff had been redeployed to use their skills for COVID-19 contact tracing, infection control, clinical care, or home isolation monitoring. From March to April, more programs had problems obtaining TB medications or saw protective gear, hospital beds, or isolation rooms diverted from TB needs to COVID-19 care.

The authors noted that weakened TB programs contributed to a resurgence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. "If essential TB program activities are not sustained, gains made in reducing US TB cases will be at risk," they wrote. — **Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ**

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.

