

The Nass Report



Wisconsin State Government and the 11th Senate District

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Wisconsin Covid-19 Testing – Significant Backlog in Reporting of Negative Results

Nass: Backlog of potentially thousands of negative results has skewed the data.

Senator Steve Nass (R-Whitewater) has been pursuing the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to publicly acknowledge there has been a significant backlog in local public health departments entering thousands of negative Covid-19 test results. Earlier this week, Dane County admitted they had not entered all of their negative results since July 10th and was running about a two week backlog in processing negative results. Dane County is Wisconsin's second largest county and has seen a huge increase in people seeking testing since mid-June.

“DHS and local public health departments have been aware of the backlog in counting negative test results and have not been transparent with the public about the situation. By rapidly including the positive test results but delaying thousands of negative test results from being included in the data released to the public, it provides a seriously incomplete picture of Covid-19 in Wisconsin,” Nass said.

DHS has provided limited information regarding the backlog even with their confirmation it exists and is significant. Here is what we know:

- Most counties are attempting to enter positive Covid-19 test results in the state data collection system within 1-3 days.

- Counties that have seen increases in Covid-19 testing volumes over the last two months (which is most of the 72 counties) have dealt with backlogs in entering the negative results into the state system. Often the delay is believed to be about 5-6 days, but there are situations like Dane County that have run 10 days or more in backlogs.

“The public and media have been given an incomplete picture of Covid-19 testing results for several weeks. DHS and local public health officials have been telling us that the increases in Covid-19 positives are not simply because of more testing. We now know those statements were inaccurate and misleading due to the significant backlog in processing negative results,” Nass said.

Nass noted that when DHS provides its daily Covid-19 briefing, the public and media are given the impression that testing data is timely and accurate. *He emphasized that the backlog in entering negative results dramatically skews the percentage positive calculations (this includes the daily percentage, the 7-day percentage and the 14-day rolling average) used in determining if we are identifying more cases due to increased testing or are in a period of increasing spread of infections for other reasons.*

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