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Whatcom County public schools Closing to Slow Spread of COVID-19

BELLINGHAM, WA – In alignment with Governor Inslee's announcement, the Whatcom County Health Department is recommending Whatcom County schools to close by March 17 through at least April 24, 2020.

Community measures, such as cancellation of events and other large gatherings, are most effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19 when implemented early in an outbreak or epidemic. They are also more restrictive and disruptive than individual actions that are also critical to slowing spread.

On March 6, the Health Department recommended that businesses and organizations cancel or postpone non-essential events. We are seeing increased spread of COVID-19 in our region and confirmation of our previous assumption that it was in our community. These school closures are coordinated throughout the state of Washington. It is important to slow the spread in order to have fewer people requiring hospitalization and critical care at one time, and to continue to be able to provide intensive medical care for complicated COVID-19 infections, as well as other critical medical conditions.

In making these decisions, we understand the significant burden that these infection control measures have on our community. We have consulted with the superintendents of Whatcom County public schools to address the consequences of recommended school closures. We have considered the impact on student learning, the continuation of nutrition services, childcare for working parents, and the needs of our homeless students. We will continue to address these with our school and other community partners.

“Working together to slow the spread of pandemic COVID-19 requires timely, burdensome, and disruptive measures, and we also need to prepare to support those affected adversely by these actions. Our overall goal is to minimize damage from the pandemic and assure we are able to recover as quickly and as fully as possible when it is over,” said Greg Stern MD, Whatcom County Health Officer.

In addition to school closures, Governor Inslee expanded the prohibition on large gatherings of more than 250 people to include the entire state.

Additional details will be available on the Whatcom County Health Department's website at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/covid>.

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