



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Increased Risk of COVID-19 Exposure in Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM, WA –While the number of lab-confirmed cases in Whatcom County are relatively low, there is evidence of increasing spread of COVID-19 in our community. As a result, the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) will no longer be reporting specific locations of public exposures to lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19.

There is currently risk to all community members of being exposed to COVID-19, which is increased in a public setting or large gathering.

Local and regional case and contact investigations indicate that people are being infected without contact to a known case and in people without a travel history. This and other evidence tells us that there are far more underlying cases in the community than the known lab-confirmed cases.

We are asking all Whatcom County residents to do what they can to help slow the spread of COVID-19. It is critical to minimize the number of people who get seriously ill at the same time. If too many people get sick all at once, this will put a high burden on our health care system. We must all take action so that we make sure those with serious illness or injuries are able to get the care they need.

As testing availability is currently still limited and there is no specific treatment for COVID-19, those with mild illness can safely forego testing. Health care providers with limited testing capacity need to prioritize testing for people with highest risk for serious illness, healthcare workers and other public safety workers, and to investigate possible clusters of cases and outbreaks.

People with mild symptoms should stay home and away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better.

Frequent handwashing, staying home when sick, and social distancing are our most effective strategies to slow the spread of disease. We are reminding people to take the following actions:

- If you are at higher risk of severe illness, stay home except to receive medical care if needed. People at higher risk include:
 - People over 60 years of age
 - People with underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease or diabetes
 - People with weakened immune systems
 - Pregnant women
- Postpone non-essential events and gatherings – both formal and informal - of ten or more people.
- Telecommute whenever possible.
- Avoid unnecessary close contact with others by staying six feet or more from others.

Additionally, the Governor of Washington has issued public health directives for our entire state prohibiting gatherings with over 50 participants, and enacting school closures and temporary closure of restaurants, bars, and entertainment and recreational facilities.

For more location information about COVID-19, go to www.whatcomcounty.us/covid.

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