



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Declaration of Emergency and New Recommendations to the Public

BELLINGHAM, WA - Today, Satpal Sidhu, the Whatcom County Executive, in coordination with the Whatcom County Health Board, declared a Whatcom County public health emergency to reduce the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in our community. In response to the rapidly evolving situation in Whatcom County, Dr. Greg Stern, Whatcom County Health Officer, has also issued new recommendations to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

Declaring an emergency facilitates coordination with local and statewide partners and is a reflection of our continued commitment to ensure a comprehensive Whatcom County response to this outbreak.

“This declaration is a step up and a step forward in our preparation to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19. It elevates the level of readiness of our public health infrastructure,” said County Executive Satpal Sidhu. “Our message to the public is simple: plan and prepare, but don’t panic. By following the advice of experts, you can help protect your family, friends, co-workers and our community at large.”

New Recommendations for Community-Wide Action

The new recommendations announced today are based on the increasing risk of spread of the disease in our area and are aligned with similar recommendations from other local health departments in our region. These are proactive steps we can all take to protect ourselves, our families and our community.

“We know that this is a difficult time for our community and these recommendations will significantly impact our daily lives,” said Dr. Stern. “The decision to make these recommendations was made based on the best public health science, which tells us that these actions are needed to reduce further transmission of disease in our area.”

The Whatcom County Health Department is now making the following recommendations:

- **People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible, including public places with lots of people and large gatherings where there will be close contact with others.** This includes concert venues, conventions, sporting events, and crowded social gatherings. People at higher risk include people:
 - Over 60 years of age.
 - With underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes.
 - With weakened immune systems.
 - Who are pregnant.





- **The community should cancel or postpone non-essential large public gatherings.** If you can feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together, we recommend postponing or canceling events and gatherings. We are loosely defining large gatherings as 10-50 people or more.
- **Workplaces and businesses are encouraged to provide options for their employees to work from home if possible.** If they cannot work from home, employees should minimize their interaction with large groups of people.
- **We are not recommending school closures at this time, but school districts may make the decision to close schools. We support them with information and guidance.**
 - While we are not recommending targeted or widespread closures at that time, individual districts make the decision to close schools as the situation evolves.
 - Closures can be effective in reducing the spread of disease. However, how effective a closure will be needs to be weighed against the impacts it causes. School closures or dismissals have wide-reaching impacts in the community, and we understand that decisions to close schools must be weighed carefully.

Whatcom County is asking that everyone in our community do their part to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Actions you can take include:

- **Stay home when you are sick.**
 - If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness and must go out in public, wear a mask. People who are sick with respiratory symptoms, like a cough or sneezing, should wear a mask in public places to prevent the spread of illnesses to others in the area.
- **Do not go to emergency rooms or urgent care clinics if your illness is mild and can be managed at home.** These facilities need to have the ability to serve those who are in most critical need. We also want to limit unnecessary visits to protect health care providers and other patients from catching infections.
- **Even if you are feeling well, avoid visiting hospitals, long-term care facilities or nursing homes.** If it is necessary to visit someone there, check on the facility's rules for visitors before showing up, limit your time there, and stay at least 6 feet away from patients at all times.
- **People who are sick with cough and fever should not attend work until 72 hours after fever has resolved or seven (7) days after the illness began, whichever is longer.** We urge employers to maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits to accommodate these measures.

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

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