



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 27, 2020

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Immediate COVID-19 Risk Remains Low; Now Is the Time to Plan and Prepare

BELLINGHAM, WA - There continue to be no cases of 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Whatcom County, and the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in Whatcom County remains low at this time. However, it is very likely that novel coronavirus will spread in parts of the United States, including Washington state, so the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) is urging community members to be informed and prepared.

If COVID-19 spreads in Washington State, it could cause disruptions to daily life because during severe disease outbreaks, public health officials may recommend community actions to limit the disease from spreading further. Exactly which actions are taken depends on how severe the outbreak is, and it is not yet known if any of these actions will be necessary for the COVID-19 outbreak.

Some of the typical recommendations made by public health officials are:

- **Closing non-essential workplaces or encouraging people to work from home** –Workplaces can be spots where disease can spread more easily between people, and temporarily closing workplaces or limiting work hours can help slow down the spread of disease. Some employers might have agreements that allow employees to work from home. All employers should be ready to [implement strategies to protect their workforce from COVID-19](#) while ensuring continuity of operations.
- **Closing schools or childcare facilities** – It's not yet known if temporary school closures will be recommended for COVID-19. Schools and childcares are places where many people are in close contact for long periods, making them places with higher risk for spreading infectious diseases. In a serious pandemic, schools and childcare facilities can be temporarily closed. School officials may also cancel school if too many students or staff are sick or absent.
- **Limiting or closing community gathering places or canceling public events** – In severe pandemics, it can be necessary to cancel public events or close places like theaters or other places where a large number of people gather together.

These “social distancing” actions, or [non-pharmaceutical interventions](#), help decrease the number of people who get sick, lightening the load on the healthcare system, and help slow the spread of the disease in the community.





Community members can take steps now to prepare for how these actions could impact their lives.

- **Prevention starts with good personal health habits:** stay home when you are sick, cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and clean frequently-touched surfaces and objects.
- **Plan for how you will care for kids or other loved ones at home.** Talk about how you'll arrange childcare if schools or childcare facilities are closed. When schools are closed, children should also avoid gathering together.
- **Discuss sick leave policies and telework options with your employer.** If you need to stay home to care for kids or other loved ones, you may be able to work remotely.
- **Be ready to help neighbors and elders in your community.** Plan for ways that you can help take care of people who are at greater risk for serious illness, like people with chronic health conditions or people over 65. Talk with your neighbors, and plan for ways you can help take care of one another, like dropping off groceries on their doorstep or taking turns with childcare.
- **Stay informed by and share reliable sources of information,** such as the [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#) and the [Washington State Department of Health](#) (DOH).

As we continue to learn about COVID-19, the health department reminds everyone that the risk of COVID-19 is not at all connected with race, ethnicity, or nationality. Allowing misinformation to spread, stigma to thrive, or otherwise ostracizing community members is counter-productive to improving public health and safety. Stigma is not going to fight this outbreak, but together, we can. Individuals can support our community's response by:

- Not making assumptions about someone's health status based on their ethnicity, race or national origin. Viruses don't discriminate and neither should we.
- Speaking up if you hear, see, or read stigmatizing or harassing comments or misinformation.
- Reminding others that it is normal to be concerned when there is an outbreak, but that the risk of novel coronavirus to the public is very low.

For more information on novel coronavirus

This is an emerging outbreak with rapidly evolving information. Updates will be made as new information emerges on the [DOH website](#) and [Whatcom County Health Department's website](#). Questions from the public can also be directed to covid@co.whatcom.wa.us.

The Washington State Department of Health has established a call center to address questions from the public. If you have questions about novel coronavirus please call 1-800-525-0127 and press #.

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