

Glossary of Terms

Relating to the novel coronavirus outbreak



Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



March 2, 2020

Whatcom County Health Department

The purpose of this glossary is to assist you in understanding the words and phrases used relating to novel coronavirus in Whatcom County.

Coronavirus: Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19 ([WHO](#)).

Novel Coronavirus: A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold ([CDC](#)).

COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019): COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 ([WHO](#)).

SARS-CoV-2: The name of the virus that causes coronavirus disease, COVID-19. As the name indicates, the virus is related to the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) that caused an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003, however it is not the same virus ([CDC](#)).

Close Contact/Case Contact: A close contact is a person who has been within about 6 feet of a person with confirmed novel coronavirus infection for a prolonged period of time or has had direct contact with secretions from a person with confirmed novel coronavirus infection ([WA DOH](#)).

Community Spread/Community Transmission/Community Acquired Spread: Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected ([CDC](#)).

Isolation: the separation of a person or group of people known or reasonably believed to be *infected with a communicable disease and potentially infectious* from those who are not infected to prevent spread of the communicable disease. Isolation for public health purposes may be voluntary or compelled by federal, state, or local public health order ([CDC](#)).

Quarantine: the separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been *exposed to a communicable disease but not yet symptomatic*, from others who have not been so exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease ([CDC](#)).

Presumptive Positive: A presumptive positive case has tested positive by a public health laboratory and is pending confirmatory testing at CDC. ([CDC](#), [CDC](#)).

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Laboratory Confirmed COVID-19 Case: individuals with at least one respiratory specimen that tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 at a CDC laboratory ([CDC](#)).

Person Under Investigation (PUI): A person under investigation (PUI) is an ill person with possible novel coronavirus infection. We will be reporting the number of PUIs who test positive and negative on our website ([DOH](#), [CDC](#)).

Person Under Public Health Supervision: People who may have had a COVID-19 exposure because they were a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case or because they traveled from an affected geographic area. They are instructed to self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days from the time of their exposure, and to report to the local health department if they develop symptoms of fever, cough or difficulty breathing. The CDC may change this definition as the situation evolves. ([CDC](#))

Social distancing: remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding local public transportation (e.g., bus, subway, taxi, ride share), and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others. If social distancing is recommended, presence in congregate settings or use of local public transportation should only occur with approval of local or state health authorities ([CDC](#)).

Asymptomatic: presenting no symptoms ([CDC](#)).

Mitigation Strategies: community actions designed to help keep people healthy, reduce exposures to COVID-19, and slow the spread of the disease such as social distancing ([CDC](#)).

Non Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs): actions, apart from getting vaccinated and taking medicine, that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of illnesses like pandemic influenza (flu). **NPIs are also known as community mitigation strategies.** When a new flu virus spreads among people, causing illness worldwide, it is called pandemic flu. Because a pandemic flu virus is new, the human population has little or no immunity against it. This allows the virus to spread quickly from person to person worldwide. NPIs are among the best ways of controlling pandemic flu when vaccines are not yet available ([CDC](#)).