

Health Alert

COVID-19 Update: Current guidance on testing, PPE, Isolation, Quarantine, and Return to Work for HCW.

March 20, 2020

Whatcom County Health Department Communicable Disease & Epidemiology Division

Washington DOH issued two documents this week summarizing current guidance on COVID-19 testing, PPE use, isolation, quarantine, and return to work for healthcare workers, superseding previous guidance. Please review both of these short documents carefully.

Attached are the two documents updating guidance on COVID-19 from Washington State Department of Health (DOH). These contain some changes from previous guidance and differ in some details from the CDC guidelines. They are based on DOH assessment of the current situation in WA, both of disease and of healthcare capacity, and of projections of both based on current trends. Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) incorporates the DOH guidance in our operations and references them in our consultation and coordination with healthcare providers in Whatcom County.

We are challenged to use limited resources to minimize the damage from the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding that we need to prioritize and conserve the use of limited resources to maintain a functioning healthcare delivery system and slow the transmission of the virus. Spread is inevitable, and we will restrict spread as well as we can with what we have. Please review the DOH *Guidance for COVID-19 testing, PPE, isolation and quarantine (3/19/2020)* (not on web) which provides a summary and link to the most current DOH documents on testing, PPE use and conservation, isolation, quarantine, and the criteria for discontinuation of each. Note the new [Return to Work Guidance for Healthcare Workers \(HCWs\) and First Responders \(FRs\) Who Have Confirmed COVID-19 Infection or Are Asymptomatic with High or Medium Risk Exposures* to a Known Case of COVID-19 \(3/19/2020\)](#).

[COVID-19 Testing Information for Healthcare Provider \(3/17/2020\)](#) provides details on testing recommendations and criteria for requesting testing from the WA DOH Public Health Laboratories (PHL). Note that while CDC/FDA **allows** testing based on a clinician's judgement that a patient may have COVID-19, CDC and WA DOH **recommend** testing for specific categories of patients. Clinicians may order testing at commercial labs. Testing at the WA DOH PHL is **available** for those meeting WA DOH priorities for testing.

Clinicians may submit specimens to WA DOH PHL directly, without obtaining preapproval from DOH or from WCHD. The document states "If seeking testing at the Public Health Laboratories, call your local health jurisdiction (LHJ) with the above information to discuss the case." **You are not required to call WCHD, but you may if you have questions about whether to test or to submit specimens to WA DOH PHL for testing.**

Whatcom Unified Emergency Management EOC has set up Unified Command to coordinate our community response to COVID-19, including seeking materials and supplies that are in short supply. One component of this response is healthcare coordination, to more effectively and efficiently respond to the pandemic, while conserving and prioritizing limited resources. You can reach the UC by emailing [WUC Liaison@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:WUC_Liaison@co.whatcom.wa.us) and will be routed to the appropriate team.

Refer patients or other with general questions about COVID-19 to the WA DOH COVID-19 Public Information Call Center at 800-525-0127. Phone lines are currently staffed from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Public Health COVID-19 links (check frequently for updates)

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3329/Novel-Coronavirus-COVID-19>

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/index.html>

Patient Handouts (Please use these for patients you evaluate)

What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDcasepositive.pdf>

What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDexposed.pdf>

What to do if you have symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDconcerned.pdf>

For more information, contact:

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