



For Immediate Release – March 6, 2020

Whatcom County Government Operations Information as Response to COVID-19

Whatcom County Executive Satpal Singh Sidhu met with department leaders and elected officials this morning to review internal and external plans for operation continuity as part of preparations during the COVID-19 response.

Currently there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Whatcom County. The Whatcom County Health Department is for the lead agency for the coordinated COVID-19 response. They are providing daily updates on case information, posted at noon at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/covid>. There is an email address for citizens with concerns at: **covid@co.whatcom.wa.us**. This email address and the health department phone lines are being continuously monitored and responded to. It is important for citizens to continue the good protocols of frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes and making appropriate preparations at home.

Internally all County departments are working with the Sheriff's Office Department of Emergency Management to ensure that operations plans are current and ready should they need to be implemented. Each department has a continuity plan. County administrative services departments are reviewing plans for such things as limited operations; ability to work from home and extra cleaning of facilities, offices and courtrooms.

The Whatcom County Health Department Incident Management Team has a policy review team in place that is now looking at policies that may be needed for social distancing and other non-pharmaceutical interventions if those things become necessary.

Communication is in place with County Emergency Medical Services that has set protocols for the safety of first responders. Plans are in place, for instance, for transfer of individuals from the border through our county with local private ambulance services if that were necessary and those services all have the proper equipment needed to ensure their safety and the safety of the public. Resource requests from agencies are processed through the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management in coordination with State Department of Health.

Local schools, senior centers, faith-based organizations and other agencies are included in regular communications with the health department and the Office of Emergency Management. Also, our state legislators have been in communication to ensure that they can act on our behalf at the state level if necessary.

Executive Sidhu states "At the present time we continue to encourage the public that the best line of defense is frequent hand washing; covering coughs and sneezes; contacting your primary physician's office if you are ill and need advice; staying informed through the Whatcom County Health Department website and social media channels, all of which have updates available. The Washington State Department of Health has a toll-free hotline at 1-800-525-0127 and press #."

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Testing ability has increased with the addition of private labs that are coming on line and the University of Washington lab. The local medical community is working closely with the Whatcom County Health Department to ensure there is coordination of response to continue to mitigate and work to slow transmission so that if there is an increase of cases the medical community will be able to fully accommodate the needed response.

The Health Department will continue to communicate information through media releases and press conferences as they are needed.

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