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Whatcom County Health Department Identifies 29 Additional Cases of COVID-19 at Shuksan Healthcare Center

BELLINGHAM, WA – Today the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) has identified 29 additional confirmed cases of 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in an outbreak among residents and staff associated with Shuksan Healthcare Center. Twenty-three (23) of these cases are residents and six are staff associated with the facility.

The WCHD recently learned that the second COVID-related death in Whatcom County, announced on March 21, is also associated with this outbreak. The individual, a man in his 80s, was discharged from Shuksan Healthcare Facility on March 10. He developed symptoms after being discharged, was later tested, and the results of the test were confirmed as positive on March 21, the day following his death.

"The Whatcom County Health Department recognizes the significance and impact of this situation. We are working with Shuksan Healthcare Center to do everything possible for all patients, their families and staff," said Mark Raaka, WCHD Emergency Preparedness Specialist also serving as Incident Commander under Whatcom Unified Command.

The cases announced today are in addition to three cases confirmed by the health department on March 21, bringing the total number of current cases associated with Shuksan Healthcare Center to 32. Of the total number of confirmed cases at Shuksan Healthcare Center, 26 are residents and six are staff. All residents continue to be cared for at the facility.

A total of nine residents and one staff person associated with the facility have tested negative for COVID-19. Results for two residents are still pending.

As of 6:00 p.m. today, the total number of cases in Whatcom County is now 48.

In response to the outbreak at Shuksan Healthcare Center, Whatcom Unified Command is actively pursuing several options to provide additional capacity for direct patient care and monitoring. PeaceHealth will be supporting Shuksan Healthcare Center by providing for all residents' dietary needs. Additionally, PeaceHealth is actively working through Whatcom Unified Command to coordinate with the facility to provide timely care for any residents should they require hospitalization.

All Shuksan Healthcare Center nursing staff and other contracted medical staff who showed symptoms of respiratory illness were excluded from work starting March 21. Healthcare workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 will be excluded from work at any healthcare facility until: at least 72 hours have passed since their fever has ended and symptoms of cough and shortness of breath have resolved; and until at least seven days since the onset of their symptoms.

Disease investigators from the Health Department are in the process of identifying and informing all close contacts of the confirmed cases. During a contact investigation, public health officials talk with individuals who have a lab-confirmed case about where they were during their infectious period and with whom they may have had contact for more than 10 minutes in a space of less than six feet. Investigators then reach out to each person who was in close contact to let them know of their potential exposure to the disease and give them instructions about how to prevent infecting others.

Visitors to long term care facilities, such as Shuksan Healthcare Center, are prohibited by proclamation of the Governor.

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