



Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



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**REGIONAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AND WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH
DEPARTMENT WORKING TOGETHER TO REOPEN ECONOMY**

Whatcom County, WA – Whatcom County’s economy has been hard hit by the global COVID-19 pandemic and local officials are developing new resources to help businesses overcome financial hardship and reopen safely.

“As the economy begins to reopen, protecting the health of our community is everyone’s top priority,” said Director of the Regional Economic Partnership at the Port of Bellingham Don Goldberg. “Building a strong and sustainable economy is absolutely dependent on our business community taking proactive steps to prevent a spike in COVID infections which might require another shut down.”

The Whatcom County Health Department and the Public Health Advisory Board are forming a Task Force to develop [tools, best practices and guidance](#) for employers to protect employees and customers from the risk of COVID-19.

“Anyone who has been to the grocery store recently has seen how business practices are changing” said Whatcom County Health Department Director Erika Lautenbach. “Social distancing, wearing cloth masks, keeping work spaces clean, and screening employees for symptoms will likely be the new normal until a COVID-19 vaccine is developed. The new Task Force being formed by Health Department and the Public Health Advisory Board will provide industry specific guidance to help our diverse business sectors reopen safely once allowed by the Governor’s order.”

An economic impact survey developed by the Regional Economic Partnership (REP) at the Port of Bellingham showed one in five workers in Whatcom County has lost their job as the result of COVID-19, with many more businesses planning to lay off workers if conditions don’t change. The REP will be leading efforts to help businesses re-open and rebuild while utilizing healthy and safe practices outlined by the Whatcom County Health Department.

“The need for relief and assistance is immense and it is critical to get direct cash transfers and grants to businesses in need as quickly as possible,” said Goldberg. “The Regional Economic Partnership is reaching out to partners at the state and federal level to access much needed resources and we are developing strategies to deliver these resources to businesses in need.”

The REP, with expertise in financing, planning, research, real estate and technology, will play a key role in helping local businesses overcome the magnitude of COVID-19 impacts. The REP is funded by the Washington State Department of Commerce, Whatcom County, the Port of Bellingham and the City of Bellingham.

“The Regional Economic Partnership will be working closely with our local business community to provide the resources they need to overcome the extreme financial hardship caused by the COVID-19 shutdown,” said Goldberg.

“As Washington begins easing restrictions under the ‘Stay Home, Stay Healthy’ order, the new Public Health Advisory Board Task Force will support local businesses, restaurants and community organizations to take steps to protect the health of their workers and their customers,” said Lautenbach.

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About the Whatcom County Health Department

The Whatcom County Health Department is a public health and human services agency with a mission to lead the community in promoting health and preventing disease. The Whatcom County Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) has created a [COVID-19 Employer Support Task Force](#) to provide tools, best practices, and guidance for bringing businesses back to work while maintaining and improving infection control. The Task Force will provide peer- and association-led opportunities to share information on procedures, implementation challenges, and group problem-solving. The Task Force will work to develop a set of best practices and guidelines for ensuring businesses have measures in place to protect their employees, customers, and clients from the risk of infection with COVID-19. This important work is in alignment with, but does not replace, the broader economic development and recovery efforts being undertaken at the county level. For more information about the Whatcom County Health Department, please visit <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/health>.

About the Regional Economic Partnership

The Regional Economic Partnership (REP) at the Port of Bellingham is the associate development organization for Whatcom County. REP is funded by the Washington State Department of Commerce, Whatcom County, the Port of Bellingham, and the City of Bellingham. The goal of REP is to retain and attract livable wage jobs and to assist businesses, entrepreneurs, and local organizations to thrive. The group works intensively with local and regional partners to create a resilient community and economy for all and to address the magnitude of COVID-19 impacts. The team has expertise in financing, planning, research, real estate, and technology for the purpose of helping businesses start, develop, and grow throughout Whatcom County, Washington. For more information about the Regional Economic Partnership, please visit www.portofbellingham.com/154/Economic-Development

About the Port of Bellingham

The Port is a county-wide municipal corporation with a mission to promote sustainable economic development, optimize transportation gateways, and manage publicly owned land and facilities

to benefit Whatcom County. Throughout Whatcom County, the Port owns, operates and maintains approximately 1600 acres of property including a shipping terminal, a cruise terminal, two marinas, industrial development areas, commercial uplands, parklands, shoreline public access areas and an international airport. For more information about the Port of Bellingham, please visit <https://www.portofbellingham.com/>