

COVID-19 Data Dashboard Explainer

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Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



What's in the COVID-19 Data Dashboard?

The Whatcom County COVID-19 dashboard shares data visualization in the following ways:

- A “current status” tab shows:
 - The total number of confirmed cases.
 - The total number people who have ever been hospitalized.
 - The total number of deaths of people who have had lab-confirmed COVID-19.
 - The percent of deaths (deaths/confirmed cases).
 - Total number of tests performed.
 - The percent of tests that have been positive, sometimes called positivity rate. There are many negative test results that have not been entered into the state’s electronic reporting system by local labs, and that causes us to show a higher positivity rate than our true positivity rate. Local labs are now able to report electronically, and these records are being entered in the coming days. We expect our positivity rate to decrease as these negative results are added to the database.
- An “epidemiologic curves” tab shows:
 - The number of confirmed cases over time by date of when symptoms first occurred. This means that if a confirmed case is reported to us on a Monday, but symptoms started the previous week, the case will be reported in the previous week on the epi curve. Because they measure different things, the daily numbers in the epi curve and cumulative case count graphs will not match.
 - The number of hospitalizations over time by admission date.
 - The number of deaths over time by date of symptoms onset.
 - For each of these graphs, hover over the day to see the number of new cases, deaths, or hospital admissions that were reported that day.
- A “demographics” tab shows percentages of:
 - Confirmed cases by sex at birth and age category.
 - Hospitalizations by sex at birth and age category.
 - Deaths by sex at birth and age category.
- A “testing” tab shows the total number of tests performed each day and whether they are positive or negative. This chart also shows the overall and daily positivity rates.

Note: On August 25th, the Washington State Department of Health changed this measure from counting number of positive tests per individual to counting positive tests by total number of tests performed (which could include multiple per individual). The new methodology has been applied to the entire 2020 time frame. The testing trends are largely the same.

With the change in methods, a new Daily Testing Rate metric was added to the Testing Capacity tab on the Risk Assessment Dashboard.

Data Updates

The data dashboard will be updated daily, between approximately 4:00-6:00 p.m. During this time, it will be unavailable for about one hour while updates are integrated.

Data for the most recent days are considered preliminary and not yet complete. Cases, deaths, negative test results, and hospitalizations from the past 4-7 days may not have yet been reported and must be verified before we can say that those results are accurate.

Even then, some of our data may change as we learn more, review records, and investigate cases. That's a normal part of our process - making sure our data is accurate - and now you get to see it happen in real-time!

Some Data Will Still Be Shared Differently

Some of the data we provide will continue to be shared as images on our website and won't be included in the dashboard.

- **Percentage of cases by race and ethnicity** - We'll continue to update this chart each Monday with new data.
- **The rate of cases by geographic regions** - Our map of cases by school district will also be updated each Monday. We break down the location of confirmed cases by school district because many people tend to identify their community in connection to schools and school districts. We don't use some other boundaries like zip codes because zip codes cut through cities and towns, so they don't align well with the way many of us identify where we live.
 - Our graphs that share data by school district boundaries show the rate of newly confirmed cases over a two week period. The two week timeframe was chosen to match the Washington State Risk Assessment Dashboard and because new infections may take up to two weeks before being diagnosed. The two week rate of newly confirmed cases allows us to better understand and respond to active infections by showing only those cases that have been diagnosed over the previous two weeks.

What's in the Whatcom County Risk Assessment Dashboard?

The Whatcom County-specific version of the [Washington State COVID-19 Risk Assessment Dashboard](#) provides additional metrics associated with the Safe Start Reopening plan.

This dashboard shares data visualization in the following ways:

- A "Phase and Risk Assessment" overview tab that shows:
 - Which of the Washington State Safe Start phases Whatcom County is currently in.
 - The rate per 100k of newly diagnosed cases during the prior two weeks, the Washington State goal, and Whatcom County's status on meeting the goal.
 - The number of individuals tested for each new case during the prior week, the Washington State goal, and Whatcom County's status on meeting the goal.
 - The percent individuals whose test results were positive for COVID-19 during the past week, the Washington State goal, and Whatcom County's status on meeting the goal. This is sometimes called positivity rate.
 - The percent of licensed beds occupied by any patient during the past week, the Washington State goal, and Whatcom County's status on meeting the goal.
 - The percent of licensed beds occupied by patients with COVID-19 during the past week, the Washington State goal, and Whatcom County's status on meeting the goal.

- A “COVID-19 Disease Activity” tab shows:
 - Current and historical rate per 100k people newly diagnosed during the prior two weeks, the Washington State goal (indicated with a dashed orange line on the chart), and Whatcom County’s status on meeting the goal.
- A “Testing Capacity” tab shows:
 - The average daily testes per 100,000 during the prior week. This measure:
 - Helps us understand the relative testing levels and our ability to detect cases.
 - Replaces “Individuals tested per new case”.
 - The average number of individuals tested daily over the past week.
 - The average number of daily cases over the past week.
 - The percent of individuals testing positive over the past week.
 - The total number of tests performed over the past week.
- A “Healthcare System Readiness” tab shows:
 - The percent of licensed beds occupied by all patients over the past week.
 - The percent of licensed beds occupied by COVID-19 patients over the past week.
- A “Case Investigations and Contact Tracing” tab and a “Populations at Higher Risk” tab will be added soon. These tabs will most likely provide information about the follow-up procedures after a case is confirmed and the number of outbreaks reported weekly.

Data Updates

The risk assessment data dashboard will be updated each weekday, between approximately 4:30-5:30 p.m., with the previous days’ information. During this time, it will be unavailable for about one hour while updates are integrated.

Data for the most recent days are considered preliminary and not yet complete. All data for the past 4-7 days may not have yet been reported and must be verified before we can say that those results are accurate.

Even then, some of our data may change as we learn more, review records, and investigate cases. That’s a normal part of our process - making sure our data is accurate - and now you get to see it happen in real-time!

Using the Risk Assessment Dashboard

This dashboard is a useful tool to further your understanding of the changing situation created by COVID-19 in our county and in our state. If you have questions about the data, please feel free to reach out and ask clarifying questions.

The metrics provided are used to determine when counties may progress to the next stage of the phased Safe Start approach, but do not represent the entire pool of data considered by the governor’s office.

The data dashboard summarizes a lot of complex information that is gathered in different settings under challenging conditions. Although this dashboard represents an enormous amount of information, your risk of being exposed to COVID-19 or sickened by the illness is greatly influenced by the actions of our local community and by our own behaviors. Whether cases are increasing or decreasing in our county, it is important to follow all health recommendations from the Department of Health.

What isn't being shared?

There are some data that we are not able to share on the dashboard. This includes:

- **Number of recoveries** - Recoveries are difficult to track. There was no definition of “recovered” from COVID-19 for quite a while, and so we were unable to determine how many people may have been considered recovered from the disease. Also, people who have tested positive for COVID-19 are not required to report to the health department or to their healthcare provider when they have recovered. It's likely that many people are recovering without even realizing that they've even been infected. Some people who become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 show little or no symptoms and therefore are not tested in the first place. Since we can't know how many people have been infected, we can't know how many have recovered, and any data we give on recovery rates would be inaccurate and misleading.
- **Number of active cases** - Similar to recovery data, active case numbers are difficult to track so we are unable to report this.
- **Detailed outbreak or cluster information** - We don't currently share specifics about disease clusters or industry and employer specific data. We need to ensure that industries, employers, employees, and groups are willing to cooperate with us during disease investigations, and releasing this information can hinder the trust and cooperation needed for our investigations to be effective. We also do not release any details that might make it possible to specifically identify anyone's medical condition.