



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Whatcom County Health Officer Recommends Remote Start for Schools

BELLINGHAM, WA – Today, Dr. Greg Stern, Whatcom County Health Officer, has recommended to Whatcom County public school superintendents and private school administrators that they plan for remote learning for the start of the school year.

“I do not feel it is safe to open schools in September for traditional classroom learning,” says Dr. Stern. “I expect that our current infection rate and its ongoing increase will not slow or reverse enough to allow for safe operations this fall. Given this, and the lead time needed to prepare for school operations, I strongly recommend schools prepare for remote learning to start the school year.”

According to Dr. Stern, there are several considerations when deciding about the upcoming school year. Case counts in Whatcom County are still rising, and community spread is continuing to grow. Spread of COVID-19 within schools may amplify transmission in the community. Students who go to school could become infected, bringing the virus into their home and potentially infecting family members or other people in their social circles.

While most school-age children are less likely than adults to have severe illness, some staff and students are particularly vulnerable to severe COVID-19 illness because of their age or underlying medical conditions. Even otherwise healthy staff and students can have serious and long-lasting complications from a COVID-19 infection.

“We want to acknowledge and thank all of the staff at our local schools who have been working tirelessly over the summer to plan for school reopening in the fall,” says Erika Lautenbach, Whatcom County Health Department Director. “This has been an unsure time for all of us, and teachers, school staff, and administrators have been demonstrating their commitment to every child’s well-being throughout this pandemic. We know that teachers want to be in their classrooms with their students, and we as a community are committed to help make that happen.”

To slow the spread of the virus and create an environment that could allow schools to reopen for on-site learning, all community members should:

- Wear a face covering in public and any time you can’t maintain six-foot distance from non-household members;
- Maintain at least six feet of distance from non-household members;
- Avoid gatherings larger than five people from outside of the household; and
- Stay home and get tested if you are feeling ill.

Schools across the nation are challenged to effectively teach students while keeping them safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, and local school administrators are not unique in seeking guidance from the county Health Officer. Health Officers from both Snohomish and Pierce counties have provided similar guidance. Whatcom County Health Department will continue to work with state and local public health and educational partners in planning and developing guidelines and in maintaining ongoing communication and collaboration with school administrators to successfully provide a safe and sustainable transition to in-person learning when it is safe to do so.

School leaders, educators and families of students should continue to monitor information from the [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) as well as the [Washington State Department of Health’s](#) schools information page.

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