



Tuesday August 11, 2020

Whatcom Unified Command COVID-19 response by the numbers

In March, Whatcom Unified Command ([WUC](#)) was activated to provide an integrated, coordinated, multi-jurisdictional response to the threat of COVID-19 locally, in partnership with the [Whatcom County Health Department](#). Over the past five months, numbers have made a difference in the shared effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

The number of people and agencies working, the volume of supplies received and distributed, and the breadth of agencies and individuals served, are unprecedented in recent memory.

Since the pandemic reached Whatcom County, WUC has relied on professionals on loan from their home agencies along with volunteers to implement objectives based on WUC's priorities: life safety; continuity of government; essential social services; and economic impacts. In support of these objectives, WUC has established and maintains an Isolation and Quarantine facility, provides delivery and support for area food banks, supported the initial Drop-In Center move, and planned and staffed a four-day low-barrier, drive-through COVID-19 testing pilot program with the Whatcom County Health Department.

"Having Whatcom Unified Command as our partner is vital to the community's all-hands-on-deck response to this public health threat," said Erika Lautenbach, Whatcom County Health Department director. "WUC supports not only the direct public health response through their partnerships in planning and operational efforts related to testing, PPE distribution, and isolation and quarantine facilities, but also has done the logistical work that's essential to support some of the basic needs for our community such as childcare and food distribution."

Testing:

The pilot testing project, which laid the groundwork for additional on-demand testing, was made possible by more than 65 Health Department and WUC staff and volunteers, working 328 shifts over four days. During that time more than 1800 tests were administered, with 19 confirmed cases identified. Additional low-barrier testing will be offered at site around Whatcom County, beginning later this month.

Byron Avenue Isolation and Quarantine:

Since the Byron Avenue facility was established in late April, more than 80 people have been able to safely quarantine for up to 14 days following exposure to someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19, or remain isolated during illness, for a total of 545 bed days.

Food support services:

Each week, WUC and volunteers from the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), the YMCA, Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), Whatcom County Search and Rescue, and community food bank partners distribute of food to hundreds of households. In just one month (June), WUC and partners distributed approximately 900,000 meals.

Volunteers:

Without volunteers, essential work of the WUC could not occur. In a four-month stretch (between March and July), approximately 200 volunteers contributed more than 8,000 hours and 10,000 miles.

Distribution:

WUC has provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to 148 agencies throughout Whatcom County. PPE materials distributed include over 200,000 gloves, nearly 140 gallons of hand sanitizer, more than 305,000 disposable masks and nearly 160,000 cloth masks. (Masks, along with handwashing and social distancing, remain the most effective proven means of at reducing the spread of COVID-19.)

The numbers that drive all others:

Over the past two weeks, between July 28 and August 10, the number of confirmed cases went up by 136, bringing Whatcom County's total to 989, with 39 local lives lost. While there is focus on the number six (the number of feet of separation in "social distancing") and the number of metrics met that are prerequisite to moving on to Phase 3, the Health Department notes "[the most important number to watch](#)" is even more personal. It's the number of people with whom each person gathers.

For more information on community resources or the work of Whatcom Unified Command, please check [WhatcomCOVID.com](#) or the [Whatcom Unified Command COVID-19 Facebook](#) page.

###

MEDIA CONTACT:

Amy Cloud, Public Information Officer
Joint Information Center
Whatcom Unified Command
WUC_JIC@co.whatcom.wa.us
(360) 318 - 4356