

# Whatcom County COVID-19 Data Report

Whatcom County Health Department

Updated 9/16/21 for the period of 9/05/21 – 9/11/21

## Overview

This report is currently published weekly to provide a narrative of current COVID-19 trends, data not available elsewhere online, and, on occasion, more in-depth analysis in our “**Spotlight**” section on COVID-19-related topics of interest. This report references data obtained from the [Washington State Department of Health’s COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#) and [DOH Sequencing and Variants Report](#), [DOH Breakthrough Surveillance Report](#), as well as the [WCHD’s Data Dashboard](#) and other COVID-related data. Note that information on these topics is rapidly evolving, and the data are always changing. This report uses the most up-to-date data available, and measures may change over time.

### Key Findings

- The recent peak in COVID-19 case rates in Whatcom County is higher than any point in the pandemic.
- The 7-day case rate among unvaccinated residents is more than 5 times the rate of vaccinated residents.
- The 7-day hospitalization rate has increased most significantly for residents in the 25 – 49 year age group and for residents 50 years and older.
- Since the delta variant became dominant in Whatcom County, unvaccinated individuals between 12 – 49 years are 30 times more likely to need hospitalization compared to their vaccinated counterparts.

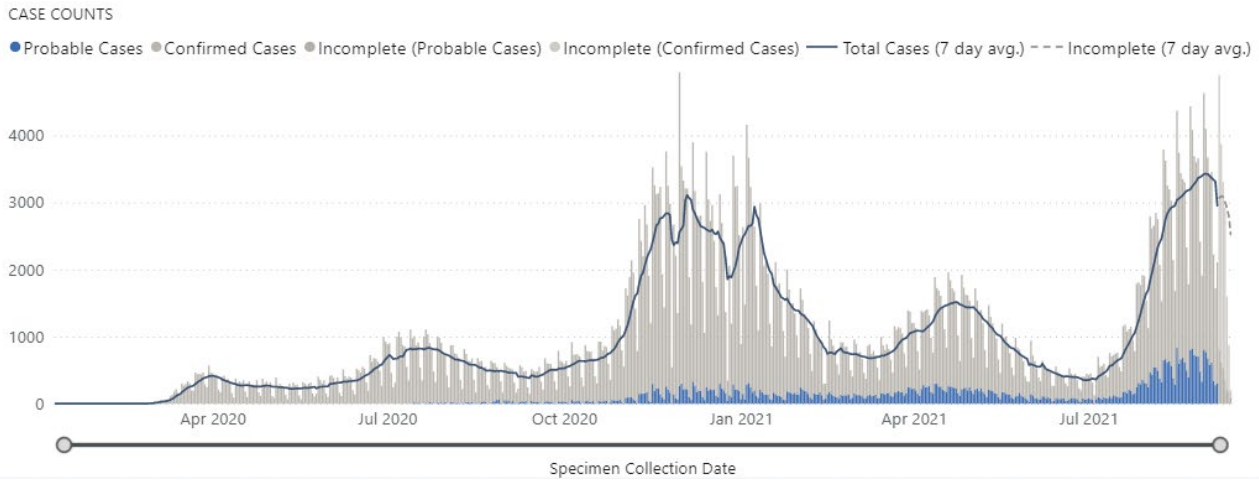
## For the Period of 9/5-9/11

7-Day Case Rate / 100,000	7-Day Hospitalization Rate / 100,000
230	15

## Overview of COVID-19 Cases

Whatcom County observed an average of 75 daily confirmed and probable cases from specimens collected during the week of September 05 – 11. This represents the first leveling-off since weekly case counts began to increase at the beginning of July. Although a plateau in case counts was observed during this reporting period, it remains unclear whether this is a pause in the upward trend or whether case counts are beginning to decline. The 7-day case rate per 100,000 residents for confirmed and probable cases has dropped in line with the reduced number of cases. Nonetheless, the recent peak in cases marks the highest level observed for Whatcom County and a case rate at the end of August that was 16 times the rate observed at the beginning of July. This rapid increase in case rates that began in July coincides with the confirmed dominance of the delta variant in Washington (see [recent variant report](#) from the state Department of Health). According to data from the Washington DOH dashboard, the 14-day case rate for COVID-19 in Whatcom County remains below the state average for the 2-week period ending 9/4 and was among the 8 lowest rates in the state.

Figure 1. COVID-19 Case Counts per Day in Whatcom County (WA DOH).



The 7-day case rates among residents 18 – 44 years old decreased during the current reporting week, while case rates for those 45 years and older held steady. The case rate among children 0 – 17 climbed throughout the month of August and still remains above the county average. Across sub-county areas, the 7-day case rates per 100,000 residents have held steady or shown downward trends in the recent reporting week. Currently, Lynden, Blaine, Ferndale, and Nooksack Valley areas still have case rates above the county average.

A majority of the 531 COVID-19 cases in Whatcom County for the week ending 9/11 continue to be reported from unvaccinated individuals (76%). This translates into a 7-day case rate for unvaccinated residents of 483 per 100,000 compared to a 7-day case rate of 86 per 100,000 for vaccinated individuals.

This reinforces that COVID-19 vaccinations are effective for preventing positive tests among Whatcom residents. Since vaccination against COVID-19 is not able to reduce the risk of infection to 0, it is still important to practice other preventive measures that include wearing a mask in public indoor settings and crowded outdoor settings, regardless of vaccination status.

Table 1. Confirmed Cases and Hospitalizations by Vaccination Status in Whatcom County for week 9/5 - 9/11.

	Week Total	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated or Partially Vaccinated
Cases	531	111	420

## COVID-19 Hospitalizations

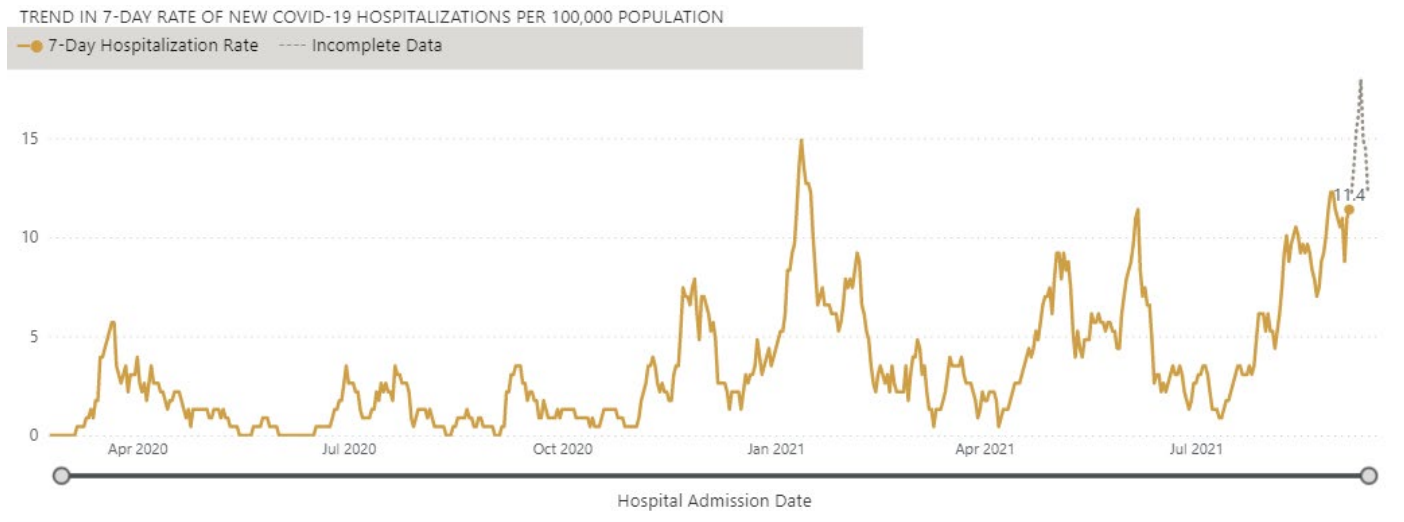
The 7-day rate for COVID-19 hospitalizations describes the number of Whatcom County residents who have tested positive (PCR test) for COVID-19 and have been hospitalized due to their COVID-19 illness. It does not include people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are hospitalized for other reasons (ex: heart attack, injuries). This rate is useful for understanding the extent of severe disease over time. The 7-day hospitalization rate has increased most significantly for residents in the 25 – 49 year age group and for residents 50 years and older. The upward trend in hospitalizations since the delta variant became dominant is examined further in the Spotlight section. During 9/5 – 9/11, a total of 37 Whatcom residents were hospitalized due to COVID-19 illness (Table 2).

Table 2. COVID-19 Hospitalizations in Whatcom County by Vaccination Status from 9/5 - 9/11.

	Week Total	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated or Partially Vaccinated
Covid-19 Hospitalizations	37	4	33

The COVID-19 hospitalization rate for Whatcom County residents remains below the state average and is currently 12<sup>th</sup> among Washington counties (out of 39 counties) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. 7-Day COVID-19 Hospitalization Rate for Whatcom County (WA DOH Dashboard)



Note: PeaceHealth reports the number of COVID-19 Positive Patients, a measure of the number of people who are hospitalized for any reason/diagnosis and who have also tested positive for COVID-19. Their care requires COVID-19 protocols to prevent infection of others in the hospital, regardless of the severity of their illness. This number is helpful in understanding changes in our hospital's COVID unit capacity, as caring for COVID-positive patients is resource-intensive.

## Spotlight: COVID-19 Hospitalizations by Age Group and Vaccination Status

While there has been a lot of discussion about breakthrough rates, this rate is not the most useful way to evaluate the risks of being infected with COVID-19, especially as more people get vaccinated. For example, if a population is 100% vaccinated, then any cases that occur will be breakthroughs. This does not mean that the vaccine is ineffective.

A more useful way to look at risk is to compare rates among vaccinated people with rates among unvaccinated people. We call this relative risk. As more people get vaccinated, the size of the vaccinated group will increase and the size of the unvaccinated group will decrease, but we will still be able to compare these groups' risks of COVID-19 infection in a meaningful way.

To do this, the Whatcom County Health Department took a closer look at the COVID-19 hospitalizations that occurred since the delta variant became prevalent in Washington. For this analysis, any resident with a positive COVID-19 test who needed hospitalization due to severe symptoms of COVID-19 was included from an 8-week period (7/11 – 9/4).

During this period, 148 cases (out of 2,858) experienced severe disease symptoms that required overnight hospitalization. Nearly two-thirds of these hospitalized individuals were over 50 years old (63%), while the remainder were between the ages of 12 – 49 years (37%). The vaccination status among residents 50 years and older is higher (73%) compared to residents 12 – 49 years (65%). The same is true for the hospitalizations reported here – only 3 of the hospitalized individuals between 12 – 49 years were vaccinated, while 30 of the hospitalized individuals over 50 years were vaccinated.

The risk of hospitalization due to severe COVID-19 symptoms among vaccinated individuals is calculated by dividing the individual counts by the total underlying population with the same vaccination status. Then the risk ratio is calculated by dividing the risk of hospitalization among unvaccinated residents by the risk of hospitalization of vaccinated residents.

Of the 148 individuals that were hospitalized, unvaccinated residents who are 50 years and older are six times more likely to need hospitalization than their vaccinated counterparts. Whatcom County only saw three hospitalizations among vaccinated individuals between 12 – 49 years. Younger residents in this age group that are not vaccinated are 30 times more likely to need hospitalization for COVID-19 compared to those that are vaccinated (Table 3).

This data reinforces our knowledge that older and immune-compromised members of the population are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and more likely to need hospitalization if they become ill. The increase in risk of hospitalization among Whatcom residents shown here is similar to the findings in the recent [situational analysis](#) by the Washington State Department of Health. COVID-19 vaccines are an effective option for reducing the risk of severe disease and hospitalization, especially in young people under 50 years old.

*Ages 12 – 49:  
Unvaccinated people are **30 times** more likely to need hospitalization than vaccinated people.*

*Over 50:  
Unvaccinated people are **six times** more likely to need hospitalization than vaccinated people.*

Table 3. COVID-19 Hospitalization by Age and Vaccination Status in Whatcom County from 7/11 - 9/4.

	COVID-19 Hospitalizations	Sub-Population*	Hospitalization Rate per 100,000 population	Relative Risk Ratio
<b>Ages 12 - 49</b>				
Not Vaccinated	51	36,434	140.0	30
Fully Vaccinated	3	65,207	4.6	
<b>Ages 50+</b>				
Not Vaccinated	63	22,939	274.6	6
Fully Vaccinated	30	60,491	49.6	

\*13,769 residents are estimated to be partially-vaccinated during this time period. These residents are not included in this analysis.

## COVID-19 Deaths

Whatcom County saw five additional deaths due to COVID-19 during the week ending on 9/11.

These include:

- 1 vaccinated female, 90-99 years
- 2 vaccinated males, 90-99 years
- 1 unvaccinated female, 80-89 years
- 1 unvaccinated male, 70-79 years

Table 4. COVID-19 Deaths in Whatcom County by Vaccination Status from 9/5 - 9/11

	Week Total	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated or Partially Vaccinated
Covid-19 Deaths	5	3	2

According to the Sept 15 [report](#) on COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalizations, and Deaths by Vaccination Status from the Department of Health, unvaccinated individuals 65 and older are more than 8x likely to die of COVID-19 than vaccinated individuals 65 and older.

In Whatcom County, more than 75% of our 65 and older adults are fully vaccinated, so the death rate of vaccinated people is much lower than the death rate in unvaccinated adults of the same age, even though at times absolute numbers may appear similar. (More explanation is planned for an upcoming report.)

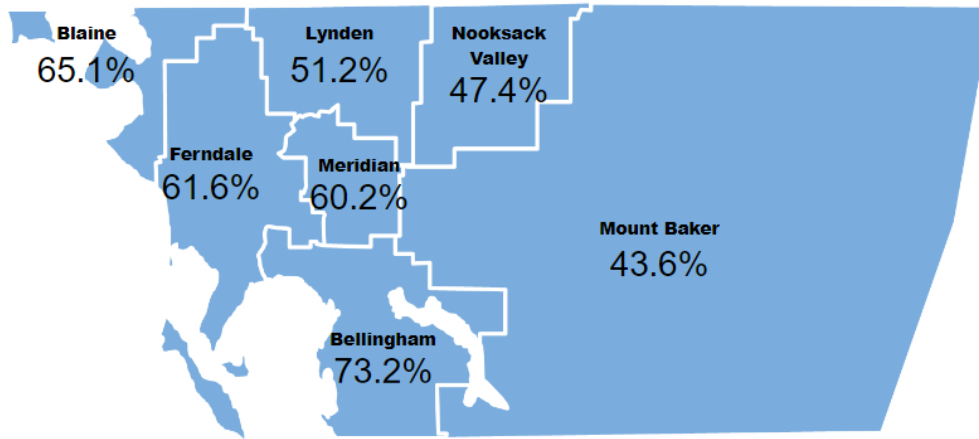
## COVID-19 Vaccinations

As of September 13, 59.0% of Whatcom County residents are fully vaccinated, and 64.6% have initiated vaccination. Of the 12 and older eligible population, 67.6% are fully vaccinated, and 74.1% have initiated vaccination. Of the eligible population, there are still 51K Whatcom County residents who have not initiated vaccination.

### Vaccination in Sub-County Areas

Vaccination initiation rates continue to be the lowest in the Nooksack Valley (47.4%) and Mt. Baker (43.6%) sub-county areas (Figure 3) and among the Hispanic population (40.5%).

Figure 3. Percent of Population Who Have Initiated COVID-19 Vaccination by Sub-County Area for Whatcom County



Whatcom County  
**HEALTH**  
Department



For more information about this report, contact [Health\\_Data@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:Health_Data@co.whatcom.wa.us). Additional data is available at [www.whatcomcounty.us/coviddata](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/coviddata).