



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 29, 2021

Media Contact: Melissa Morin, Public Information Officer
Whatcom County Health Department
(360) 594-2504
Health-PIO@co.whatcom.wa.us

Whatcom County Health Department Statement on Lynden Christian Schools Closure

BELLINGHAM, WA -- Whatcom County Health Department works closely with schools across the county, with a focus on keeping children safe and in school. Due to concerns about an uncontrolled outbreak of COVID-19, Whatcom County Health Department reached agreement with Lynden Christian Schools to close in-person instruction for 14 days. The school board announced their decision on September 28, effective Wednesday, September 29.

“The temporary closure of Lynden Christian Schools is an unfortunate but necessary step to halt the spread of COVID-19 in the school environment and prevent further risk to the whole community,” said Dr. Amy Harley, co-health officer for Whatcom County. “We support the school board’s decision to temporarily close in-person instruction and extracurricular activities in order to quickly curtail the current outbreak so that the school can reopen for in-person learning when it’s safe to do so.”

Whatcom County health officers deemed that closing Lynden Christian Schools was necessary to protect the public’s health given:

- Evidence of a school-associated outbreak of COVID-19 with uncontrolled disease transmission.
- Limited adherence to both [Washington State Department of Health K-12 COVID-19 Requirements for Summer 2021 and the 2021-2022 School Year](#) and [state requirements of schools](#) for contact tracing and disease notification.
- Unsuccessful efforts to reach compliance with the above requirements through communications between the Whatcom County Health Department and Lynden Christian Schools over the past three weeks.

In reviewing available COVID-19 information from Lynden Christian Schools, Whatcom County Health Department noted multiple cases and/or exposures in nearly every grade and classroom and several classrooms and grades that met the Health Department’s operating definition of a school-associated outbreak. The definition, endorsed and recommended for adoption by health officers across Washington State, describes an outbreak as:

- multiple cases comprising at least 10% of students, teachers, or staff, within a specified core group OR
- at least three (3) cases within a specified core group meeting criteria for a probable or confirmed school-associated COVID-19 case with symptom onset or positive test result within 14 days of each other, who were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting (i.e. household) outside of the school setting; AND
- epidemiologically linked in the school setting or a school sanctioned extracurricular activity.

A “core group” includes but is not limited to extracurricular activity, cohort group, classroom before/after school care, etc.

“Closing an entire school is something we are very reluctant to do and is recommended only when more narrowly-targeted control measures are inadequate to stop the spread of infection,” said Dr. Greg Thompson, co-health officer for Whatcom County. “We want students to be in school, learning safely with their peers. In-person learning has numerous health benefits for children and youth. That’s why schools and public health agencies worked hard to develop standards for schools to safely operate in-person even in the midst of widespread community transmission of COVID-19. But in order for in-person learning to work - not only for students but also for their families and neighbors in the broader community - schools need to adhere to the legally-required standards set for masking, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, and other COVID-19 mitigation measures which have been proven effective in preventing spread of COVID-19 in schools.”

“We’re grateful for the ongoing conversations with Lynden Christian Schools about our shared work in keeping kids, families, and the whole Whatcom County community safe. We’re continuing to work together for a successful return to in-person learning,” said Dr. Harley.

###