WCHD COVID-19 Data Dashboard FAQ

Overview:

The new COVID-19 data dashboard provides timely information about the history and progression of COVID-19 in our community and presents data in a meaningful way that is easy to understand. We strive to provide a balance of information that informs residents, complements what is made available by the State Department of Health (DOH), and protects individuals' personal health information. The new dashboard provides summary information on COVID-19 in Whatcom County and case, hospitalization, and death rates by vaccination status.

What dates are used for the data on the first summary page?

The data summary includes data from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to the present day. The data is updated every Thursday and displays the data through the previous Saturday. For the summary page, the cumulative case count and the 7-day case rate are by specimen collection date. The cumulative hospitalization count and 7-day hospitalization rate are by admission date. The cumulative death count is by death date. The counts of fully vaccinated and boosted are people who are currently ages 12+ and had a booster dose after August 13, 2021. This information can be found in the (i) pop-up in the upper right-hand corner of the page.

Why does the WCHD display rates by vaccination status?

The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) data dashboard presents data on cases, hospitalizations, and deaths by vaccination status. Vaccines are an important tool in preventing COVID-19 severe illness, hospitalization, and death. To help the community better understand the effect of vaccines on COVID within Whatcom County, we provide data showing infections, hospitalizations, and deaths among unvaccinated, vaccinated and boosted populations in Whatcom County over the pandemic to date. These data should not be used to estimate vaccine effectiveness or risk ratios as the data does not control for the differences in risk, behavior, and testing in vaccinated and unvaccinated populations.

Why doesn't WCHD publish calculated vaccine effectiveness?

The WCHD provides data on rates of infection, hospitalization, and death among people who are unvaccinated, fully vaccinated and fully vaccinated with at least one booster. Vaccination affects COVID outcomes, but other factors such as age, health status, and risk behaviors can also affect these outcomes. To learn more about vaccine effectiveness research, we recommend reviewing the information provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness
CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Research

Can rates among partially vaccinated individuals be compared with those who are full vaccinated or unvaccinated?

No, the WCHD dashboard only displays rates among unvaccinated, fully vaccinated, and boosted individuals.

Why are the case rates by vaccination status only for those ages 5+?

Only those five and older are currently eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine.

Why are only two age groups provided for the hospitalization rates by vaccination status?

It is helpful to stratify by age to see how age affects the risk of hospitalization and death. However, dividing into too many age groups would result in small numbers in each group, resulting in large fluctuations in rates. Comparing two age groups represents a balance between these factors. Hospitalization counts by specific subpopulations are made available in the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Count table on the last page of the dashboard.

Why are the death rates by vaccination status only for those ages 50+?

Death rates are only shown for Whatcom County residents 50 years old and older due to the relatively smaller number of deaths in other age groups and associated instability in rates when comparing small numbers. Death counts by age groups are made available in the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Count table on the last page of the dashboard.

Why can't I see case counts less than 10?

The WCHD adheres to the WA DOH policy and guidelines to protect privacy and confidentiality when releasing data with small numbers. A breach of confidentiality occurs when there is a release of information in a way that allows an individual to be identified. Small numbers also raise statistical issues concerning accuracy, and thus usefulness of the data. Our adoption of the standard requiring the suppression of cells reporting between 1 and 9 events is based on the practice of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

Why did we remove rates by county area?

In May 2020, when COVID-19 case counts were sufficiently high enough to avoid identifying individual cases, the WCHD started publishing case data by sub-county geography. School district boundaries were chosen to align more closely with our county communities. Now in Spring 2022, the case counts are low to the point that the potential identification of individual cases is a concern. Whatcom continues to have many days where the number of cases by sub-county area is less than 10. Furthermore, comparing rates between sub-county areas is challenging as there is no way to quantify and compare the rate of confirmatory testing that occurs in each area, especially with the recent distribution and use of over-the-counter tests and differences in the ability to access testing across areas. Case counts by area are made available in the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Count table on the last page of the dashboard.

Why did we remove Whatcom County rates by age?

The WCHD wants to avoid duplicating information already provided on the Washington State DOH dashboard and instead focus on providing data that cannot be found elsewhere. To locate this information on the [DOH Dashboard](), select the 'Demographics' tab, make sure 'Cases' are highlighted, click on the County option, and select Whatcom.

Why did we remove cumulative and new case counts (map)?

Case count data by sub-county area can be reviewed by month and year on the last page of the dashboard. The data table also provides cumulative case counts from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Counts page, select the sub-county area of interest in the drop-down menu under 'Residential Area'.

Why did we remove cumulative death counts by decade?

Cumulative death counts can be reviewed by month and year on the last page of the dashboard. On the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Counts page, select the age group of interest in the drop-down menu under 'Age Group'.

Why do we no longer have a table of race/ethnicity for Whatcom county?

Race and ethnicity case, hospitalization, and death counts by month and year can be reviewed on the last page of the dashboard. The data table also provides cumulative counts from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Counts page, select the race or ethnicity of interest in the drop-down menu under 'Race/Ethnicity. These data should be interpreted with caution as over 50% of COVID-19 cases do not include information on race/ethnicity. This limits the ability to draw conclusions about these groups in Whatcom County.

Why did we remove vaccinations status by age?

The WCHD wants to avoid duplicating information already provided on the Washington State DOH dashboard and instead focus on providing data that cannot be found elsewhere. This information can be located on the [DOH Dashboard](#) under the tab 'Vaccinations' and 'Who is getting vaccinated'. Vaccinations by age and status are also available in the Case, Hospitalization, and Death Count table on the last page of the dashboard.

Why did we remove initiating vaccination by area?

Early in the pandemic, when vaccine supplies were limited, vaccine initiation was an important measure of which communities were being reached with access to vaccines. Now that vaccine is readily available, it is more important to look at the completion of the vaccine series and receipt of booster doses. Information on vaccinations at the county level can be located on the [DOH Dashboard](#) under the tab 'Vaccinations' and 'Who is getting vaccinated?'.