

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS 2019

(Updated March 24, 2020)

1. WHAT IS A CORONAVIRUS?

A coronavirus describes a large number of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illness. But there are coronaviruses that have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Novel coronavirus 2019 is a new coronavirus and can cause pneumonia. Other terms you may see used to name this virus include: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, or 2019-nCoV.

2. WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS?

This is a respiratory illness. Symptoms include cough, fever, sore throat, and/or difficulty breathing. The degree of severity of these symptoms varies. This disease can cause pneumonia. There have been deaths from this illness. However, most cases (80%) do not appear to be severe. People may experience symptoms similar to a cold or the flu.

3. WHERE DID THIS VIRUS COME FROM AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Like MERS and SARS, COVID-19 closely resembles coronaviruses found in bats but not humans. Scientists believe that the bat virus had a change in its genes that permitted it to spread to humans, possibly via an intermediate carrier (snakes) in an animal market in Wuhan, China. Early on, it is difficult to know the exact source of the virus, how well it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. The virus can be transmitted from person to person via droplets that come from the nose or mouth when we cough or sneeze. Those droplets can directly enter the nose, mouth or eyes of a person standing close by, or they can be indirectly transmitted by hands and inanimate objects.

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through: the air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact like shaking hands, or touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

4. WHAT ARE RISKS FOR GETTING THE VIRUS?

The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. However, individual risk is dependent on exposure. People who are close contacts of someone with a confirmed case of the 2019 novel coronavirus are at higher risk.

Close contacts of a confirmed case should stay home and remain quarantined there for 14 days to monitor for symptoms. If they develop symptoms or if symptoms worsen, they should contact their medical provider by phone or online.

Due to the increasing number of cases, our disease investigators are no longer able to contact every person who is considered a close contact of a confirmed case. We are still contacting all confirmed cases, which includes anyone who has a positive test result as well as anyone who is a close contact of a confirmed case and develops symptoms of respiratory illness.

When someone is contacted because they are a confirmed case, they will receive guidance from our public health staff as well as an official letter from the Snohomish Health District to provide to close contacts that provides notification and instructions. If a confirmed case identifies close contacts in a high-risk category, the District may also reach out individually to those contacts. High-risk categories include: healthcare workers, first responders, and individuals who are 60 years or older, have underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems, or are pregnant.

If you receive a message by phone, email or mail that you are a close contact of someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19, it is important that you follow the instructions.

Workplaces may be notified by an employee that they are a confirmed case or close contact. [A table with general guidance for isolation and quarantine is available online.](#) The employer should work with that employee to ensure needed support, such as sick leave benefits or remote work options. Additional notification may be sent to other employees in the workplace at the employer's discretion, while respecting the medical privacy of the affected employee.

This is an evolving situation and the District's role and guidance may change (sometimes rapidly) with the passage of time, a change in circumstances, and/or release of updated guidelines from DOH and CDC.

5. HOW MANY COVID-19 CASES ARE THERE IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY?

Our daily update on case counts is issued at approximately 2 p.m. on weekdays. Cases reported over the weekend will be reflected in the Monday update.

Please be aware, as more testing has become available, we are getting increased numbers of reports from laboratories and other facilities. It takes time to reconcile data in order to report numbers accurately.

In addition, we report case numbers, including numbers of deaths, each day that are official through 11:59 p.m. the night before. People may hear directly from health care facilities that provide different numbers of deaths than our official count, and may be providing it before we have the information and a chance to reconcile the data.

Due to the increased numbers of cases and more data flowing into the Snohomish Health District that needs to be analyzed, we are no longer able to provide specific

information about all cases as we did earlier in this outbreak. We will continue to provide details on deaths, when available, for the time being.

If there is a case in someone at a school, workplace or other facility, there may be additional communication from the affected facility to notify students, staff and families. The Health District is coordinating with local partners to help provide accurate information and guidance.

The tally of confirmed or presumptive positive cases is not the full picture. There are likely additional cases who do not have symptoms or have mild symptoms, similar to a cold or the flu, and have not been identified through testing. Although this illness can be severe, the majority of cases appear to be mild or moderate.

6. WHAT IS THE STATUS WITH SCHOOL CLOSURES?

Governor Jay Inslee announced Thursday, March 12, that schools in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties are required to close from Tuesday, March 17, through Friday, April 24. Prior to the order, multiple local school districts already had opted to close schools.

We know that this will have a tremendous impact on our community. Plans are being put in place to ensure that meals are still provided for students and families who need them. Questions about graduation requirements, college admissions, and exams like the SAT or ACT also are being addressed.

It is important that students and families continue to monitor communications from [their local school districts](#).

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction has stated that OSPI is working on employment security plans for those affected by the closures.

While the impacts of closing schools are significant, this measure is being done to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Though school-age children are not considered a high-risk group for severe illness from the virus, they can spread the virus and they have contact with others in the community who are at high risk.

7. ARE PUBLIC GATHERINGS BEING CANCELED?

Yes. Governor Jay Inslee on March 23 announced the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. For at least two weeks, people in Washington are required to stay home unless they are:

- Doing an essential activity like shopping for groceries or going for a medical appointments
- Getting take-out food. Restaurants may also deliver.
- Going to work at an essential business. More information on what is an essential business is available here:

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/EssentialCriticalInfrastructureWorkers.pdf>

- Going outside for walks or exercise, as long as social distancing (at least 6 feet from other people) is maintained.

Gatherings of people for social, spiritual and recreational purposes are prohibited, both public and private. Businesses that are not essential can continue remote operations (employees working from home). Businesses providing essential services still must ensure proper health and safety measures to prevent the spread of illness.

Dr. Chris Spitters, health officer for the Snohomish Health District, also issued an order on March 17 that outlines the steps all businesses and organizations must take.

- Older adults or people with underlying conditions are encouraged not to attend
- Social distancing recommendations are in place. People should avoid being within 6 feet of each other for longer than momentary or minimal contact.
- Employees are screened for coronavirus symptoms each day and excluded if symptomatic
- Proper hand hygiene and sanitation must be readily available to all attendees and employees
- Environmental cleaning guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are followed, including more cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces at least daily.

People who are at higher risk from COVID-19 and should take extra precautions include those who:

- are over 60 years of age
- have an underlying medical condition, like heart disease, lung disease or diabetes.
- have weakened immune systems
- or are pregnant.

If you have questions about whether you or your child is at higher risk from COVID-19, ask your health care provider.

8. WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS?

Under the governor's order from March 23, businesses that are not considered essential services can continue remote operations (employees working from home) but must shut down in-person operations for at least the next two weeks. Businesses providing essential services still must ensure proper health and safety measures to prevent the spread of illness.

More information on what is considered an essential service is available at:

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/EssentialCriticalInfrastructureWorkers.pdf>

Restaurants may continue to provide take-out and delivery but cannot allow on-site dining. Grocery stores and pharmacies are allowed to continue operations. Child care,

banks, convenience stores, and school food programs also are among the activities that are allowed to continue under this order.

The goal of these measures is to reduce the spread of this illness in the community, and it is vital that people follow them.

The Health District encourages people to support local businesses. Order take-out or delivery from local eateries or check out online or phone options offered by local businesses. A fund has also been set up to help with the impacts of COVID-19 in Snohomish County, and people can donate at www.cf-sc.org.

9. WHAT IS SOCIAL DISTANCING?

It's a common strategy for reducing the spread of disease. The closer the contact between people – and the more people in a group – the greater the risk of passing along viruses.

Try to keep at least 6 feet away from others. Avoid handshakes and hugs – use smiles and “hellos” instead. If you want some kind of physical contact, go for fist or elbow bumps.

Stay home aside from essential trips like medical appointments while the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order remains in effect, as well as if you have a compromised immune system; are pregnant; have a serious condition such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease; or have a cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing. People older than 60 are especially vulnerable to the COVID 19 virus. Consider having groceries and supplies delivered.

10. DOES THE HEALTH OFFICER REALLY HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO RESTRICT ACTIVITIES?

A combination of Health Officer's Orders and Governor's Orders have been issued during this response. The Governor can issue orders for the state – including Snohomish County – and the Health Officer also has the authority to issue orders specifically for Snohomish County.

First, we do not take these measures lightly. They are carefully considered and based on the best information we have about this virus and the ability to reduce transmission. We know these rules have a large impact on our communities. However, they are crucial for the preservation of lives.

In the 10th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, it states that: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

In Washington, the state Legislature enacts statutes, the Governor and state agencies enforce laws and promulgate regulations, and the courts interpret the laws.

[RCW 70.05.070](#) lays out the powers and duties of a local health officer. This includes: “Take such action as is necessary to maintain health and sanitation supervision over the territory within his or her jurisdiction.” These measures are put in place to maintain the health of the people of Snohomish County.

11. WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?

There are currently no restrictions for who can be tested for COVID-19 in Washington State. However, Department of Health [guidance to healthcare providers](#) directs them to focus testing on people with COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. While anyone can ask a provider to be tested for COVID-19, testing is provided at the provider’s discretion.

People still should contact their medical provider if they are ill in order to be evaluated for testing and it is not absolutely necessary for everyone with a cold to be tested for coronavirus. Your medical provider may want to monitor your illness or test you for something other than COVID-19, such as influenza.

A new testing option also began operation on March 23 for high-risk Snohomish County residents with COVID-19 symptoms, including those who work in healthcare, public safety or critical infrastructure. Testing is free and is **by appointment only**. People must meet criteria to be tested at this drive-thru testing site, and more information is available at www.snohd.org/drive-thru-testing.

Those who are being tested for COVID-19 are to remain isolated at home while results are pending. Others who live with them but are not ill will only be required to quarantine if the test results are positive.

It is important that people who are not ill do not go to the clinic or hospital seeking coronavirus testing. If you are ill and believe you may have been exposed to coronavirus **call ahead** to your medical provider before coming in.

People who are ill only with mild cold symptoms also should NOT immediately go to a clinic, hospital or the Health District seeking coronavirus testing. Doing so displaces other patients who truly need urgent care and increases the risk of spread of respiratory infections in health care settings.

12. WHAT IF I CAN’T GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH MY PROVIDER?

The response to COVID-19 is demanding a tremendous amount from our health care system. The role of the healthcare system in this response is diagnosis, treatment, ongoing care, and addressing individual health concerns.

Healthcare and dental providers may ask you to postpone non-urgent visits or procedures. They may also be providing tele-health options (consultations by phone or online).

If your symptoms worsen, call your healthcare provider for further instructions. If you

are experiencing a life-threatening situation, call 911. If you have a mask, try to put that on before first responders arrive.

13. WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE INSURANCE?

In response to the growing concern about COVID-19, the Washington Health Benefit Exchange on March 10 [announced a limited-time special enrollment period](#) for qualified people who are currently without insurance.

The special enrollment period continues through April 8. Those who are looking to enroll in health insurance should call the customer support center for the health benefit exchange between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. That number is 1-855-923-4633.

The state and federal government are also working to roll out expanded options. We will update this document and our website when more details are available.

14. HOW LONG IS SOMEONE CONTAGIOUS?

We are still learning about this disease, which first was identified in China in December 2019. Based on our current understanding, symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure, and people are believed to be most contagious when they are symptomatic. This means someone who is infected is most likely to spread the illness when they are actively coughing or sneezing.

It is possible for people to spread the illness when they have mild symptoms or no symptoms. For confirmed or presumptive positive cases who are isolated at home during recovery, they are not released from isolation until follow-up tests have come back negative at least twice, showing that the virus is not present in samples from swabs of their mouth and nose. This may take several weeks.

It is possible that an undetected case who self-isolates because they were exposed or are not feeling well could be contagious after their symptoms go away. Transmission would be less likely when they don't have symptoms compared to when they are actively symptomatic, which is why encourage anyone who has symptoms to stay home and avoid contacts with others.

15. IS THERE A VACCINE FOR 2019 CORONAVIRUS?

At this time, there is no vaccine for coronavirus. Efforts are underway to develop a vaccine. However, that process could take 12-18 months at the soonest.

You can help prevent the spread of illness by washing hands often with soap and running water, staying home if you are sick, avoiding close contact with others who are sick, covering your coughs or sneezes with a tissue, and cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces frequently with EPA approved cleaners.

16. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK?

If you feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, immediately self-isolate. Stay home and away from others. [Call your health care provider before going](#) to get care

and tell them about your symptoms as well as any recent travel or contact with someone who has COVID-19. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

Your health care provider may want to monitor your symptoms or test you for COVID-19 or other illnesses like influenza.

There are many causes of fevers, coughs, and other respiratory symptoms. Clinics may have surgical masks patients are asked to wear while in the clinic. Please protect others and wear a mask if asked. Wash your hands. Cover your cough or sneeze. If you are ill, stay home.

17. HOW IS THIS VIRUS TREATED?

The vast majority (at least 80%) of people with COVID-19 recover just with their own immune response. Treatment is supportive care for symptoms, fluid intake, and isolation/observation. About 10-20% of cases appear to have severe enough disease to require hospitalization. Those patients also receive supportive care and treatment for complications of the infection (pneumonia, problems breathing, etc.). One experimental anti-viral treatment is being studied in China, but its effectiveness has not yet been demonstrated.

18. HOW CAN I PREPARE?

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of standard prevention steps for respiratory illness. Continue to practice those. Increase frequency of handwashing, make sure you are cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, and stay home if you are ill. All of these are key for slowing the spread of illness. Masks are not recommended as a prevention strategy for people who are well in the general public. Medical providers have specific guidance on masks and personal protective equipment and should follow that guidance.

Take many of the same steps to prepare for an outbreak as you would to prepare for other emergencies:

- Make an emergency plan of action with your household members, relatives, and friends.
- Know your workplace's sick leave policies and whether you can work remotely.
- Decide who will pick up and watch children if schools or child cares are closed, or if children get sick.
- Have emergency supplies like nonperishable food, water, personal hygiene supplies, and medicine or other medical supplies in an accessible emergency kit – enough to last your household for at least 14 days.
- Include a list of emergency contacts as well as a list of medical conditions and medications for household members.

Please respect the orders and rules put in place to help reduce the spread of illness. We are relying on our community to do the right thing to keep people safe and healthy.

Set up a separate room in the household for someone who is sick and clean the room regularly. Clean, disposable facemasks may be useful for the individual who is sick, not for the well members of the household.

Know your neighbors or friends in the area and be ready to support each other during an emergency. Check in on those who live alone or have underlying health conditions and may need extra support. If you live alone, talk to your friends and family members about who would be available to call or message to check in on you if you become sick.

Through all of this, remember to stay calm, prepared and informed. Check reliable sources for updates and follow the advice of public health professionals.

19. WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED OR AT HIGHER RISK?

People who have underlying conditions or are otherwise immunocompromised are at higher risk from this illness, as well as other illnesses like the flu. Avoiding contact with ill people is crucial.

If a household member of someone who is immunocompromised is suspected of having or confirmed to have coronavirus, the CDC instructs healthcare professionals and local public health staff to assess isolation options for the COVID-19 patient outside of the home so that they are not in proximity to the immunocompromised household member.

If you do not have an ill household member but are immunocompromised, talk to your healthcare provider about what steps you should take to protect yourself. While masks are not recommended for the general public as a preventive measure, a healthcare provider may suggest that someone with a particularly vulnerable immune system wear a mask. Please follow your healthcare provider's guidance and keep in mind that masks are not the best option for everyone with a vulnerable immune system.

Now is also a good time to learn what options your healthcare provider may have for remote consultations, by phone or online. This can help you get your questions answered before going into a clinic, thereby minimizing exposure to this virus as well as other illnesses.

People who are 60 or older, as well as people of all ages who have underlying medical conditions, are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Other higher risk groups include pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems.

20. SHOULD I STAY HOME FROM WORK OR KEEP MY KIDS HOME FROM SCHOOL OR CHILD CARE?

Schools are closed at this time and workplaces are closed except for essential services and remote work (see "What are the rules for businesses and organizations" above). Employers should maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits to accommodate these measures.

People with symptoms such as cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing, or who have been contacted by public health because they are a close contact of a confirmed case, should stay home and away from others. **Do not attend work or other activities until 72 hours after fever has resolved or 7 days after the illness began, whichever is longer.**

If you have specific questions about your symptoms or care, contact your medical provider. Please call ahead before showing up to a clinic or other health care facility.

Continue to monitor messages from your school district, child care facility, workplace, and the Snohomish Health District for updated guidance.

21. WHY ARE CHILD CARES OPEN IF SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED?

At this time, child cares are open for children of essential workers or vulnerable children who do not have alternative care. Parents who can keep their children home or arrange for other care need to do so at this time. Child cares should not be used for socializing children for a few hours a day or because the parent(s) needs quiet time to work at home. If you are working remotely, your children should be home with you. And while socializing is important, this is not the time to have children in groups when it is not absolutely necessary. Social distancing is essential to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Child cares play a crucial role in ensuring that those who cannot work remotely still have a safe place for their children. Many people who are critical to this pandemic response – including first responders, dispatchers, and health care workers – are not able to work remotely.

However, child care providers must be able to meet health and safety requirements. A few highlights of those requirements are: excluding sick employees from work; sending sick children home; meeting all CDC recommended cleaning and disinfecting procedures; and ensuring proper hand hygiene and sanitation are readily available to all children and staff.

Child care providers also may make individual decisions to close due to staffing or health issues, or they may need to close if a staff member or child becomes ill with COVID-19. We are encouraging child care providers to talk to families about the possibility of long-term closures and to make plans for their business. They also should look at closing temporarily if they cannot staff their child care without employees who are part of a high-risk group, which includes people who are 60 or older, people who have underlying medical conditions or weakened immune systems, and pregnant women.

Again, parents who can keep their children home need to do so. With schools and businesses closed, it is crucial that child care is prioritized for those who cannot work from home or stay home from work for an extended period of time. If a portion of

families can keep their children at home, it reduces the group size in child care settings, which minimizes potential for exposure.

Social distancing (maintaining at least 6 feet of space aside from momentary or minimal contact) is not realistic in large groups of young children. Smaller groups reduce the risk of spreading illness and make it more manageable for child care providers to keep up with health needs like monitoring for symptoms, encouraging children not to touch their own or each other's hands and faces, and frequent cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces and objects.

22. WHY ISN'T THERE A LIST OF EXPOSURE LOCATIONS?

Coronaviruses like COVID-19 spread primarily among close contacts. They are spread through respiratory droplets when people cough or sneeze, or by touching a surface where the virus has been and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This is different from an airborne virus like measles, where we would release locations of general exposure.

If a case is confirmed or presumed positive in someone at a school, workplace or other facility, there may be additional communications from the affected facility to notify students, staff and families. The Health District is coordinating with local partners on providing information and guidance.

23. IS IT SAFE TO DONATE BLOOD?

Yes! Blood supplies are running low because of worry over COVID-19. As with any other situation, people who are ill should stay home and should not go to donate blood. However, people who are well may certainly do so. You can't catch COVID-19 from donating blood. In fact, as supplies become critically low, we encourage you to donate blood.

24. IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY?

Prior to any trip, be sure to check CDC travel notices at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. Multiple countries have been listed at a level 3 warning, which means to avoid nonessential travel, or a level 2 warning to practice enhanced precautions while traveling. The list of countries with travel notices, as well as the level of a country's notice, may change quickly.

If you are ill, avoid travel. If you are planning trips, be prepared to cancel non-essential travel and monitor alerts as the situation changes.

25. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Visit www.snohd.org/ncov2019, www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus or www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. Follow the Snohomish Health District on social media (facebook.com/SnohomishHealth, twitter.com/snohd)

A statewide hot line also has been set up at 1-800-525-0127, then press #.