

WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department



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From Cathy Halke (Council
Office)
In Special Health
Board.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Declaration of Emergency and New Recommendations to the Public

BELLINGHAM, WA - Today, Satpal Sidhu, the Whatcom County Executive, in coordination with the Whatcom County Health Board, declared a Whatcom County public health emergency to reduce the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in our community. In response to the rapidly evolving situation in Whatcom County, Dr. Greg Stern, Whatcom County Health Officer, has also issued new recommendations to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

Declaring an emergency facilitates coordination with local and statewide partners and is a reflection of our continued commitment to ensure a comprehensive Whatcom County response to this outbreak.

"This declaration is a step up and a step forward in our preparation to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19. It elevates the level of readiness of our public health infrastructure," said County Executive Satpal Sidhu. "Our message to the public is simple: plan and prepare, but don't panic. By following the advice of experts, you can help protect your family, friends, co-workers and our community at large."

New Recommendations for Community-Wide Action

The new recommendations announced today are based on the increasing risk of spread of the disease in our area and are aligned with similar recommendations from other local health departments in our region. These are proactive steps we can all take to protect ourselves, our families and our community.

"We know that this is a difficult time for our community and these recommendations will significantly impact our daily lives," said Dr. Stern. "The decision to make these recommendations was made based on the best public health science, which tells us that these actions are needed to reduce further transmission of disease in our area."

The Whatcom County Health Department is now making the following recommendations:

- **People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible, including public places with lots of people and large gatherings where there will be close contact with others.** This includes concert venues, conventions, sporting events, and crowded social gatherings. People at higher risk include people:
 - Over 60 years of age.
 - With underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes.
 - With weakened immune systems.
 - Who are pregnant.

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- **The community should cancel or postpone non-essential large public gatherings.** If you can feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together, we recommend postponing or canceling events and gatherings. We are loosely defining large gatherings as 10-50 people or more.
- **Workplaces and businesses are encouraged to provide options for their employees to work from home if possible.** If they cannot work from home, employees should minimize their interaction with large groups of people.
- **We are not recommending school closures at this time, but school districts may make the decision to close schools. We support them with information and guidance.**
 - While we are not recommending targeted or widespread closures at that time, individual districts make the decision to close schools as the situation evolves.
 - Closures can be effective in reducing the spread of disease. However, how effective a closure will be needs to be weighed against the impacts it causes. School closures or dismissals have wide-reaching impacts in the community, and we understand that decisions to close schools must be weighed carefully.

Whatcom County is asking that everyone in our community do their part to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Actions you can take include:

- **Stay home when you are sick.**
 - If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness and must go out in public, wear a mask. People who are sick with respiratory symptoms, like a cough or sneezing, should wear a mask in public places to prevent the spread of illnesses to others in the area.
- **Do not go to emergency rooms or urgent care clinics if your illness is mild and can be managed at home.** These facilities need to have the ability to serve those who are in most critical need. We also want to limit unnecessary visits to protect health care providers and other patients from catching infections.
- **Even if you are feeling well, avoid visiting hospitals, long-term care facilities or nursing homes.** If it is necessary to visit someone there, check on the facility's rules for visitors before showing up, limit your time there, and stay at least 6 feet away from patients at all times.
- **People who are sick with cough and fever should not attend work until 72 hours after fever has resolved or seven (7) days after the illness began, whichever is longer.** We urge employers to maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits to accommodate these measures.

Additional details will be available on the Whatcom County Health Department's website at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/covid>.

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Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for Employees

How can I stay informed about coronavirus?

The Whatcom County Health Department is the lead agency for the COVID-19 event. Their website is updated every day at noon. They are constantly monitoring State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention information to update messages. Here is the link to Frequently Asked Questions.

How can I avoid getting the coronavirus?

Here are recommended everyday preventative actions:

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or alcohol-based sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Keep a ready supply of tissues and alcohol-based wipes and dispose immediately after use.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces (doorknobs, keyboards, and phones). Facilities is cleaning frequently visited and public areas of County buildings daily.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick (within six feet).
- Maintain at least three feet between yourself and someone who is coughing or sneezing. Consider nodding your head or bumping elbows instead of shaking hands.

What should I do if I have symptoms that may be COVID-19?

Call your doctor before visiting in person. Also, consider using the 24/7 "telehealth" services available through County medical plans:

Teamster Plan B	Nurse Line	1 (855) 784-4561
Teamster Plan B	Virtual Care	teladoc.com/Premera OR 1 (855) 332-4059
HMA All Plans	MDLIVE Telehealth	https://members.mdlive.com/hma/landing_home

All copays and/or deductibles for COVID-19 lab testing will be waived and covered at 100%.

How do I get paid during absence due to illness?

You can use sick leave for your own illness and to care for a covered family member. The State's Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) may also provide monetary benefits. Your HR Rep can help you consider options.

What happens if my child's school or day care facility is closed for public health reasons?

You can use sick leave to cover your absence.

How are we preparing for the possibility of limited County operations?

Leaders are working on "continuity of operations" plans and ways to maintain services with fewer in-person visits.

Are there alternate ways of working if I have to stay home?

Most County jobs are public-service oriented with essentials tasks that can't be performed from home, however we are exploring Cloud-based technology and video conferencing as tools for some remote work assignments.

What other resources might be available to employees through the State of Washington?

Although we are not yet at this point, the State has adopted emergency rules for temporary shut-downs, isolation, and quarantine for workers and businesses.



COVID-19 STRATEGIES FOR WHATCOM COUNTY

1. Encourage employees to use 24/7 Telehealth tools if they or a family member experience acute respiratory illness symptoms (cough, shortness of breath).

- Teamster Plan B **Nurse Line** 1 (855) 784-4561
- Teamster Plan B **Virtual Care** teladoc.com/Premera OR 1 (855) 332-4059
- HMA All Plans **MDLIVE Telehealth** https://members.mdlive.com/hma/landing_home

2. Encourage employees to stay informed and seek support.

The Whatcom County Health Department is the lead agency for the COVID-19 event. Their website is updated every day at noon.

KEPRO, the County's employee assistance program (EAP) is a valuable resource. Log onto EAPHelpLink.com and enter company code (WHATCOM) for articles and credible news sources about the Coronavirus and tips for coping with feelings or emotions.

3. Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.

- Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- Employees can use sick leave accruals for their own and for a family member's illness.
- The State's Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) may also provide monetary benefits. This program is very new, so there are still questions.
- If employees run out accrued leave, they can request leave donations.

4. Anticipate absences and talk with each employee (Supervisor/Employee Discussion Tool).

- Review current **leave balances** (sick leave, comp time, vacation).
- Explore opportunities for **cross-training** to cover essential department functions.
- Due to the nature of our work, most County jobs have **limited options for working off-site**. Explore any essential tasks that might be temporarily performed off-site.

5. Perform routine facility environmental cleaning.

- Identify all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs and clean these areas with cleaning agents and disinfectants normally used.
- Facilities will provide additional cleaning daily for all frequently visited and public areas.

6. Offer only solutions within current policies and resources.

Supervisors can help set the stage for calm and measured approaches. We can plan, not panic.

7. Update your department / division Continuity of Operations Plans.

Emergency Management has sample plans and is reaching out to help leaders with this work.

8. Encourage employees to bring you their concerns.

The Health Department and the County Administration are working hard to address questions as we can and to plan the County's response to a Coronavirus pandemic. No one has all the answers yet on this emerging situation. Supervisors can reach out to Human Resources for support and information.



Preparing for an Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Supervisor / Employee Discussion Tool

SICK LEAVE POLICY AD139400Z

Accrued sick leave can cover absences for:

- Employee’s illness (mental or physical), injury, or health condition, and for preventive care.
- Employee’s care for a family member’s illness (mental or physical), injury, or health condition, and for preventive care.
- Public health closures of County facilities or a dependent’s school or care facility.

What is the employee’s current sick leave balance? _____

For low sick balances and/or leave requests for “social distancing:”

Current comp time balance? _____

Current vacation leave balance? _____

COVERING FOR ABSENCES: CROSS-TRAINING? DESK MANUALS? OTHER?

This will be different for every position, but what tools, training, or information would help someone else step in to cover their work if the employee is absent?

TELEWORK?

Due to the nature of public service work, most County jobs have limited options to work off-site. It would be helpful now to talk about these.

- Are there essential tasks in the job that might be temporarily performed off-site?
- If so, what cloud-based tools could the employee use remotely? (For example, email, voicemail, County website, InsideWhatcom, etc.)

Please send questions to HR@co.whatcom.wa.us.

COVID-19 Scenarios & Benefits Available

The information shared on this flyer does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any other agency or company. It is the reader's responsibility to verify the facts of coverage.

COVID-19 SCENARIOS		Paid Sick Leave (employer paid)	Unemployment Insurance		Paid Family & Medical Leave	Industrial Insurance (L&I)
		Current Law	Current Law	Emergency Rule	Current Law	Current Law
1	Worker is mildly ill with COVID-19.	✓	✗	✓	?	?
2	Worker is severely ill with COVID-19.	✓	✗	✗	✓	?
3	Worker was exposed and quarantined. Business remains open.	?	✗	✓	✗	?
4	Worker is caring for sick family member.	✓	✗	?	✓	✗
5	Schools are closed by a public official because of COVID-19 and worker has no childcare.	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
6	Worker is immune-compromised and advised to self-quarantine.	?	✗	✓	?	✗
7	Worker is afraid of gathering in a group and refuses to go to work (self-distancing).	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
8	Employer must shut down due to a quarantine by a public official.	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
9	Employer shuts down due to a business slowdown or lack of demand.	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
10	Employer reduces available hours due to business slowdown or lack of demand.	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
11	Employer stays open in defiance of public health urging to close.	✗	?	?	✗	✗
12	Health care workers and first responder are under quarantine.	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓



The Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711

YES
 NO
 MAYBE (case by case)

ESD.WA.GOV

