

## Letter to the Community: August 13, 2021

Hello Thurston County! I hope you are finding ways to stay cool in this hot weather we are having this week.

On August 12, 2021, I issued a [masking directive](#) for Thurston County and [joined health officers representing all 35 local health jurisdictions in Washington State](#) in support of wearing masks in public indoor spaces. I issued this directive due to rising transmission rates and COVID-19 hospitalization rates in our county, as well as new information released by the CDC on the delta variant showing that both unvaccinated and vaccinated people can spread COVID-19 when infected. Masks are a safe and effective way to both control spread of disease by blocking infectious respiratory particles being exhaled (source control) and protects the wearer by reducing the inhalation of respiratory particles in the environment. Well-fitting, multilayered masks without valves provide the most effective protection. The CDC scientific brief on mask efficacy can be accessed here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>. Masking up when in public indoor spaces is a simple thing we can all do to protect our community members, including children under 12 who have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

The delta variant has significantly changed the dynamics of COVID-19 in our county. The delta variant like other SARS-CoV-2 variants is spread through respiratory droplets and aerosols. However, it is much more contagious than prior variants, potentially causing more than twice as many infections. While unvaccinated people are at highest risk of infection and transmitting disease, a small number of fully vaccinated people can become infected and spread the disease to others. This is particularly important because some studies suggest that the delta variant causes more severe disease than prior variants in people who are not vaccinated. While vaccinated people can become infected and transmit the virus, they are less likely to become infected and much less likely to become so sick that they require hospitalization or die from COVID-19. There is evidence that fully vaccinated people who become infected may be infectious for a shorter time period than unvaccinated people.

While we are still learning about the specific impacts of the delta variant on transmission patterns, it is clear that in Thurston County we are seeing a sharp rise in COVID-19 hospitalizations, the majority of which are occurring in people who have not yet been vaccinated and is straining our local hospital capacity. Two of the best preventative steps we can take are to get vaccinated when eligible and mask in public.

While we are facing a challenging time, the same principles of preventing spread of COVID-19 that we have been doing throughout the pandemic still apply. If you have [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19 please stay home and get tested, even if you are fully vaccinated. Quarantine when instructed by public health. Avoid crowded areas whether indoors or outdoors. And of course, if you are going to a public indoor area, remember your mask!

More information about the delta variant can be found at the CDC website:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html>

Wishing you the best of health,

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