

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Question

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department (updated 7/10/20)



If you have a medical emergency, please dial 911. If you have other medical concerns, please contact your health care provider for guidance or an appointment.

General Information FAQ

What is an antibody, or antibody testing?

An antibody is something that is used by our immune systems to kill bacteria or viruses. Our bodies make antibodies when we have either had a disease, or when we are given a vaccine. Measuring whether a person has antibodies for a specific disease can be used to determine if that person may be immune to that disease.

Is there antibody testing for COVID-19?

Antibody tests are currently being used for COVID-19, and can be a great surveillance tool, but they do have limitations. It cannot be used to diagnose someone who is currently ill with COVID-19. To determine if you are infected, you need a viral test. Antibody tests should not be used to diagnose COVID-19. Because of the cross reactivity with ordinary Coronavirus, it can be difficult to tell if a positive test is due to COVID-19 or six other strains.

These tests indicate the presence or absence of antibodies, but not whether the antibodies are protective. Having a positive test does not mean you are protected from getting COVID-19 again. More time and research are needed to understand how to use antibody testing results. The [CDC](#) has additional information on antibody testing.

Regardless of antibody test results, we urge everyone to continue to use hand hygiene, wear a face covering, and maintain at least six feet physical distance to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19.

Are there people recovering from COVID-19 in our community?

Most confirmed cases in Thurston County have recovered and have been released from isolation. Some have been hospitalized and Thurston County has five fatalities, as of July 10, 2020. You can find the most up-to-date COVID-19 data online [here](#).

Not everyone infected with COVID-19 has symptoms or get tested. Most people infected have little to mild symptoms. Statistically, only about 20% are sick enough to seek health care, are tested, or are hospitalized.

Am I required to wear a face covering?

Yes. On June 8, 2020 as part of the Governor's [Safe Start](#) plan, employees are required to wear face coverings. On June 26, 2020 the State Secretary of health issued a statewide mandatory face covering order. The order requires all Washington residents to wear a cloth face covering in public when they cannot stay six feet away from others. On July 7, 2020 the Governor issued an order stating businesses must require face coverings of all customers and may not serve any customer if they do not comply with the statewide face covering mandate.

The CDC also [recommends](#) you wear a cloth face covering. Face coverings can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others. When you wear a face covering, you help protect others around you.

Please avoid using the N95 disposable masks and leave those for medical workers who need them for close contact with patients. For personal use, homemade face covering are okay.

If you choose to use a re-useable face covering, make sure you clean it at least daily or when it becomes contaminated or wet. Also, avoid touching the inside of the face covering to avoid contamination. Physical distancing is another tool for protecting yourself.

How can I help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Here are seven ways you can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Maintain physical distancing, keep at least 6 feet away from other people.
- Wear a face covering over your nose and mouth when you are in public. Cover your cough and then wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth without cleaning your hands first.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid crowds.

I want to go to a large public gathering, such as a protest or rally. What should I do to protect myself and others?

You should wear a face covering and do your best to maintain proper physical distancing of 6 feet while in public gatherings. Avoid touching your face. Use hand sanitizer during the event and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when you return home.

I attended a large public gathering and I didn't wear a face covering or practice physical distancing. What should I do?

It is best to stay at home and self-isolate for 14 days. If you are experiencing symptoms of a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue, contact your healthcare provider to determine if you need to test for COVID-19.

Why can't you tell me more about the cases or about the people being tested?

More information about cases will not tell you if people you encounter or things you touch could potentially expose you to COVID-19. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services

case investigation of a confirmed case is very thorough. It identifies persons or settings and when and where significant exposure may have occurred. Investigators contact identified contacts and give them [guidance on what to do](#) and symptoms to look for.

Multiple diseases circulate in the community with symptoms similar to COVID-19. There are also cases in the community that exhibit mild illness and never seek care or are unable to be tested. A person who tests negative one day might be infected the next, with or without symptoms.

It is safest for everyone to protect themselves. Wear a face covering when out in public. Limit exposure to other people (6 ft distance is recommended), avoid contact with people who are ill, wash your hands, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, avoid touching your face, and stay home when you are sick. The Washington State Department of Health has [guidance](#) for persons caring for sick loved ones at home.

It is also important to know that Thurston County Public Health and Social Services must comply with Washington State laws protecting medical confidentiality. By law, we can only release limited information about cases.

What is Thurston County doing to help the homeless during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Thurston County received just under a million dollars from the Washington State Department of Commerce to work with multiple jurisdictions, shelter providers, and outreach coordinators to support the health and safety needs of this population.

Some steps the county and its partners are taking include coordinating food delivery with outreach and shelter providers to decrease the need for people to leave their shelter location to get food, exploring options to increase shelter beds for those who have been displaced due to physical distancing rules, establishing isolation and quarantine beds for homeless and displaced individuals who are ill, and increasing hygiene and sanitation by funding portable toilets and handwashing stations.

What is physical distancing?

Physical distancing is using best practices to keep a safe distance between people. In the case of COVID-19, a disease spread through droplets, people should stay at least 6 feet away from each other.

Other physical distancing measures include:

- Avoiding crowds.
- Staying home. Skipping community events and gatherings.
- Working from home, if you can.
- Avoiding contact with people who are sick.

Additional best practices include:

- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

- Covering your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces
- Frequently washing your hands for 20 seconds

Why aren't more people being tested?

Viral testing is the only way to confirm if you have COVID-19. Typical symptoms are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Many patients also complain about severe fatigue and a new loss of their sense of smell or taste. Specially if you have been around someone else that had these symptoms recently or know you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, you can go get a test from your medical provider or the community testing locations.

The test is a swab sample taken of the inside of your nose and results are usually available in 3-5 days. While awaiting results, we ask that anyone experiencing symptoms self-quarantine and stay away from other people, cover your cough, and practice good hand hygiene. If symptoms worsen, please call your health care provider. In a life-threatening emergency, call 911.

How can I access insurance?

To see if you qualify for insurance, visit the [Washington Healthplanfinder](#). The Washington Healthplanfinder offers low cost and no-cost access to health insurance for those who qualify.

If you are employed, talk with your employer about what options are available to you.

How can I find a health care provider?

If you have Medicaid (Apple Health), and know what plan you have (Amerigroup, Molina or United Healthcare), you should contact them directly. They will assign you to a doctor or verify if you already are assigned to a provider. The Washington State Health Care Authority also has a provider search tool to find a doctor (such as family medicine, pediatrics) who accepts Medicaid.

- [ProviderOne Find a Provider Search Tool](#)

Thurston County is also served by two federally qualified health centers that offer a sliding fee scale discount and accept Medicaid (Apple Health).

- [Sea Mar Community Health Center](#)
- [Valley View Health Center](#)

What do I do if I have been in close contact, or may have come in contact with, someone who tested positive for COVID-19?

If you have, or may have, been in contact with someone infected with COVID-19, you will need to watch for symptoms. Those key symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Other people also complain about severe fatigue, muscle or body aches, headaches, sore throat, congestion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, a new loss of their sense of smell or taste. These symptoms can show up anytime between 2-14 days from exposure.

And, so you don't potentially spread COVID-19 to others, continue:

- Practicing physical distancing
- Wear a face covering when around other people

- Cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.
- Washing hands regularly.
- Covering coughs and sneezes.

If you begin showing symptoms, please isolate, even from your household contacts, and contact a health care provider for next steps. If you are having a medical emergency, call 911. You can also take advantage of the free drive-thru testing at the [Providence Medical Group Hawk's Prairie Clinic](#) at 2555 Marvin Rd NE, Lacey. Please make sure you call 855-776-4362 before you go. [Sea Mar Community Health Centers](#) is also offering free scheduled drive-thru and walk-up appointments at many of their locations.

How will my workplace/business/organization be notified if an employee, student or someone else connected tested positive for COVID-19?

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services may contact an employer, business, or organization if there is an outbreak. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services will not disclose protected health information to an employer, business, or organization.

The process Thurston County Public Health and Social Services follows is:

- If a case is laboratory confirmed, the lab will notify Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Disease Control and Prevention staff.
- Thurston County Public Health and Social Services contacts the confirmed COVID-19 individual. The investigator works with them to identify anyone they came in close contact (defined below) with. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services contact tracers then contact each of those individuals to notify them of potential exposure and advises them to quarantine and monitor for symptoms.
- Thurston County Public Health and Social Services asks the confirmed COVID-19 individual to notify their employer, if they are in the workforce, and notify Thurston County Public Health and Social Services when that has been done.
 - If the workplace is a school, Thurston County Public Health and Social Services staff will then work with the school to identify close contacts and determine next steps for the school.
 - If the workplace is an agency or organization, the agency or organization often contacts Thurston County Public Health and Social Services and works with us to determine next steps and to notify other employees or others who may have come in close contact.

What does close contact mean?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines 'close contact' as being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for at least 15 minutes starting 48 hours before the person began to feel sick until the time the patient is isolated. Close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a health care waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case OR having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on).

- More information [visit the CDC](#).

People I know are feeling anxious and worried about COVID-19, is there any help for them?

Events and rapid changes happening around COVID can be stressful. Visit our COVID-19 [Mental Health and Coping](#) webpage for resources.

Contact Information

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department

- Phone: 360-867-2500
- WA Relay: 711 or 800-833-6338
- COVID-19 Website: <http://bit.ly/ThurstonCOVID-19>