



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

May 12, 2021

Schelli Slaughter, MHA
Director

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Dear Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

Unfortunately, Thurston County's case rate per 100k population over the last two weeks surpassed 200 cases yesterday and the percent of positive tests for COVID-19 is also increasing. I will continue to watch our case counts and trajectory for the next 14 days to determine if this is a sustained or a temporary increase in COVID-19 transmission in our county. I will update you in 14 days with information on COVID-19 disease trajectory in Thurston County. At this time, schools may continue serving students in their community as planned.

In the meantime, schools are advised to prepare to implement the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Washington State Department of Health (DOH) [K-12 School 2020-2021 Guidance](#) pertaining to high levels of community transmission in the event that this level of transmission is sustained. This includes keeping as many middle school and high school students as possible in school utilizing cohorting, plus at least three feet of distance or increasing distance to six feet in classrooms when cohorting is not possible. Cohorting means conducting all activities in small groups that remain together over time with minimal mixing of groups.

I want to emphasize the DOH recommendations for middle and high schools when COVID-19 transmission is at high levels (above 200) are in place to reduce the level of disease transmission in schools. There are no recommended changes for elementary schools, however, all schools are advised to be vigilant about preventing COVID-19 transmission by following public health guidance.

Reducing opportunities for transmission among middle and high school students is a proactive, protective strategy designed to keep schools open and keep students and teachers safe, even when community transmission is high. Each school and/or district may differ in their approach to implementing guidance and preventing COVID-19 transmission depending on school facilities, space, staffing, and student population size.

Please encourage parents, students, teachers, and community members to get tested if they are experiencing [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Furthermore, I would also like to strongly encourage anyone who has not been vaccinated, who is eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine, to get vaccinated. All three vaccines are safe and effective tools in our fight against this virus and ending this pandemic.

The COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine is widely available in our community and currently approved for students 16 and older. We anticipate the Pfizer vaccine will soon be approved for 12-15 year olds as well. Parents of middle and high school students whose children are attending in-person school should consider getting their children vaccinated as soon as possible to help protect our local schools and keep students

and educators safe, healthy, and well. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services welcomes partnerships with schools to increase access to vaccines for eligible student populations.

Thank you for all you are doing to promote the safety and well-being of those who work and learn in our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Abdelmalek, MD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MHP
Health Officer, Thurston County