



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

May 26, 2021

Schelli Slaughter, MHA  
Director

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH  
Health Officer

Dear Thurston County Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

When I last wrote to you on May 12, 2021, our case rates had increased to greater than 200 cases per 100K over 14 days and I informed you I would closely observe the COVID-19 disease transmission trajectory in our county. Since that time, our COVID-19 transmission rates have plateaued and as of today, they are at 191.1 cases per 100K over 14 days and our test positivity rate is 6.3 percent per the [Risk Assessment Dashboard](#). This is considered moderate community transmission. This means there are no recommended changes to cohorting or physical distancing for middle and high school students. Based on our current trends, I do not anticipate a need for schools to modify current learning modalities for K-12 students for the remainder of this school year.

I recommend each school and district continue to work to mitigate COVID-19 risks by following the Washington State Department of Health key principles for reducing COVID-19 exposure at school:

- Keeping ill persons out of school. Educate students, families, and staff to stay home when sick, and use screening methods.
  - Using cohorts. Conduct all activities in small groups that remain together over time with minimal mixing of groups.
  - Physical distancing. Minimize close contact with other people.
  - Hand hygiene. Frequently wash with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand gel.
  - Protective equipment. Use face coverings or shields and other barriers between people.
- **Please note that masks are still required in schools at all times.**
- For employees, follow all Labor and Industries (L&I) and Employer Health & Safety Requirements for School Scenarios guidance.
  - Environmental cleaning and disinfection. Prioritize the cleaning of high-touch surfaces.
  - Improve indoor ventilation. Open windows when possible.
  - Isolation. Isolate sick people and exclude exposed people.
  - Low risk spaces. Outdoor spaces are safer than indoor spaces. Move activities outdoors when possible.

I also strongly recommend all people age 12 and older get vaccinated as soon as possible. An additional benefit to vaccinating eligible school aged children is if they are identified as a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and they are not experiencing any symptoms, they can return to school and do not need to quarantine, so long as they themselves have not tested positive for COVID-19. Currently, the Pfizer vaccine is available to children 12 and older. The COVID-19 vaccine is readily available in the community and vaccine location information can be found at: <https://vaccinelocator.doh.wa.gov/.Vaccinated>.

Ensuring students and staff quarantine is one of the most important steps in keeping our schools safe. Maintaining the safety of those who work and learn in our schools will require our community to work together to support people when they need to isolate due to COVID-19 infection and quarantine when they have been exposed. School quarantine guidance is outlined in the [School Communication Plan](#). Masks continue to be a requirement at school, per Washington State Department of Health guidance, and remain an important safety measure for students and staff. As we have learned more about the COVID-19 vaccines, we have learned they not only protect against both severe illness and death, but also decrease the risk of spreading the disease to others.

I thank all of you for doing your part to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community. I commend our school leaders, educators, families, and students for your resilience, flexibility, and commitment to keeping our kids safe, healthy, and learning. We are at a dynamic point in the pandemic. COVID-19 is still a very serious threat in our county. The largest fraction of new cases has been occurring in children under age 18 in Thurston County over the past few weeks. I believe we can overcome this hurdle by maintaining our vigilance against COVID-19 at school, home, during sports/recreation activities, and while out in the community. You can protect kids from COVID-19 through vaccination, masking, hygiene, socializing responsibly, sharing information with case investigators/contact tracers, following isolation/quarantine protocols, and adhering to school guidance and policies.

Sincerely,

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH  
Health Officer, Thurston County