

COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department (updated 4/2/20)



Should I wear a mask?

Masks are okay to use, it's really a personal choice. However, if you are going to use a mask in your personal life, please avoid using the N95 disposable masks and leave those for health care workers. Health care workers cannot use homemade masks in the medical setting because they get contaminated, but for personal use, they are okay. The homemade masks will contain droplets and are a consistent reminder to not touch your face.

If you choose to use a reusable mask, make sure you clean it at least daily or when it becomes contaminated or wet. Also, avoid touching the inside of the mask to avoid contamination.

Remember, whether you wear a mask or not, you need to maintain a proper social distance, 6 feet away, from others. The masks will contain droplets if you cough or sneeze, but they won't protect you if someone else coughs or sneezes in your face. The droplets could still get into your eyes or nose or go through the cloth mask.

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

Social distancing is what will work to protect you. Additional information about existing cases will not tell you if people you encounter or things you touch could potentially expose you to COVID-19.

Public health case investigation of a confirmed case is very thorough and identifies persons or settings when and where significant exposure may have occurred. Identified contacts are informed and given guidance on what to do and symptoms to look for.

- <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDExposed.pdf>

There are multiple diseases that are circulating in the community that have symptoms similar to COVID-19. In addition, there continue to be cases in the community that exhibit mild illness and never seek care, or are unable to get confirmatory tests. Even a person who tests negative one day might be infected the next, with or without symptoms.

It is safest for everyone to protect themselves by social distancing. Limit exposure to other people (6 ft distance is recommended), avoid contact with people who are ill, wash your hands, and avoid touching your face. Guidance is available for persons who are caring for sick loved ones at home.

- <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Caregivingforlovedones-English.pdf>

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 has 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 of the steps that 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 social distancing rules, establishing potential isolation and quarantine beds for homeless and displaced individuals who are ill, and increasing hygiene and sanitation by funding portable toilets and handwashing stations.

More details are available in a 3/20/20 Thurston County News Release:

<https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/tchome/pages/newsreleasedetail.aspx?List-ID=2050>

What is social distancing?

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

Other social distancing measures include:

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

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.

Why aren't more people being tested?

Testing for COVID-19 will continue to be limited until we have adequate resources to protect our health care workers.

The issue with testing resources is that everyone wants to be tested and resources are not available to accommodate those requests. If a person has, or thinks they have COVID, they are asked to self-isolate. If they get sicker, they may be hospitalized, and testing is done at that time.

Other than prevention by washing hands, not touching face, staying home when you are sick, and self-isolation, there is nothing that is done differently when a person has COVID, unless they need respiratory support in a hospital. There is no treatment. This is why prevention methods are so important.

People seeing doctors may get tested for the flu because, for some people, they can be treated for the flu.

Why isn't more testing being done?

Testing is being done. There is mandatory reporting for confirmed cases as well as for patients who are suspected of having COVID-19 and are in the hospital, and for patients who are symptomatic and being tested. It is difficult to estimate the number of negative results. While the state tracks the tests they do, there are currently multiple agencies testing. Reporting is not consistent across agencies.

How can I access insurance?

Washington State has opened a special enrollment period due to COVID-19 through the Washington Healthplanfinder. This is specifically open to uninsured adults and children.

- To see if you qualify for insurance, visit the <https://www.wahealthplanfinder.org/>. The Washington Healthplanfinder offers low cost and no-cost access to health insurance for those who qualify.

If you are employed, you can also talk with your employer about what options may be 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 who you have been assigned to.

The Washington State Health Care Authority also has a provider search tool to find a doctor (such as family medicine, pediatrics) that accept Medicaid.

- <https://fortress.wa.gov/hca/p1findaprovider/>

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 <https://www.seamar.org/services-thurston.html>
- Valley View Health Center <https://www.vvhc.org/locations/olympia/>

Why aren't masks and other protective gear available?

According to the Washington State Department of Health, "the increase in people with respiratory symptoms visiting clinics and needing care is straining our health care system's supply of PPE in some areas. It's a challenging problem, and they are working to solve it in several ways. When PPE supplies can't be filled by a health care facility's normal suppliers, and the state can't find a vendor with supply, the state requests from the federal government PPE supplies from the federal Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)."

For more details, see the Washington State Department of Health's 3/13/20 news release at: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Newsroom/Articles/ID/1117/Addressing-shortages-of-Personal-Protective-Equipment-PPE>

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?

- Practice social distancing
- Sanitize surfaces
- If you begin showing symptoms, isolate and call your health care provider to determine next steps

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

Because of Washington State legal requirements requiring confidentiality, Public Health does not notify an employer, business or organization if there is a confirmed case of any infectious disease that is reported to us, including COVID-19.

The process Public Health follows is:

- If a case is laboratory confirmed, the lab will notify Public Health's Disease Control and Prevention staff.
- Public Health contacts the individual who is confirmed to have COVID-19 and works with them to identify anyone they came in to *close contact* with. Public Health then contacts each of those individuals to notify them of potential exposure.
- Public Health will ask the individual who is confirmed to have COVID-19 to notify their employer, if they are in the workforce, and notify Public Health when that has been done.

- If the workplace is a school, Public Health 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 Public Health 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 defines 'close contact' as being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time (10 minutes or more); 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).

- For more information visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#protect>

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. There are a few resources that can help.

- In situations like this the national Disaster Distress Helpline is operating.
 - Phone 1-800-985-5990
 - Text: TALKWITHUS to 66746
 - TTY: 1-800-846-8517
 - Webpage: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Contact Information

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department

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