

Letter to Community: February 18, 2021

Hello Thurston County! I hope you all stayed warm and enjoyed the snow this last week! I want to use this week's letter to give you an update on the best available guidance for wearing masks since the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated their recommendations.

Wearing a mask is essential in protecting ourselves, as well as others, from getting COVID-19. Masks work by providing a barrier between your nose and mouth and the outside world. There are two important parts to effective masking. One is fit, always make sure you don't have significant gaps between the mask material and your face where respiratory droplets can get in or be expelled out. The second is layers, additional layers will stop more potentially infectious respiratory droplets. Remember to always choose a mask option that helps you see and breathe easily.

The CDC has several recommendations to improve the effectiveness of a mask. One is to use a mask with a nose wire to prevent air leaks around the nose. Another way to prevent air leaks is to wear a [mask fitter](#) which helps the mask remain close to the contours of the face. Tying ear loops can also improve the fit. The CDC does not recommend using NIOSH approved respirators needed by health care personnel. Another option is to wear two masks with a disposable mask as the bottom layer and a cloth mask over the disposable mask. The cloth mask helps hold the disposable mask to the face and improve fit. The CDC's new guidance does not recommend doubling disposable masks together. They also do not recommend combining a KN95 mask or NIOSH approved respirator with any other mask.

I also wanted to update you on trends in transmission rates here in Thurston County. While our COVID-19 transmission rates have been decreasing across the county, it is still very important if you are experiencing [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or have been identified as a close contact of someone who tested positive for COVID-19, to stay home and get tested. Please continue to wear a mask, stay six feet apart from non-household members, frequently wash your hands, and avoid large gatherings.

I also want to encourage all of you to prioritize your health beyond COVID-19. You can do this by eating healthy balanced meals, getting enough rest, doing activities to get your body moving, connecting with friends and family, and pursuing interests and hobbies that bring a sense of peace and well-being. Health is more than the absence of disease; it is the presence of well-being. Taking care of yourself makes you better able to take care of others.

I have been getting a lot of great questions recently. If you have a question you would like covered in a community letter, please send them to us. You can send them to tcphss.pio@co.thurston.wa.us.

Wishing you the best of health,

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