

Letter to the Community: July 8, 2020

Hello Thurston County! I am excited to be your new Health Officer. I moved up from California and I have been exploring the county on the weekends. I have loved being near mountains, the Puget Sound and forests. It has been wonderful to be in the middle of so much natural beauty. As a coffee person, I have enjoyed sampling incredible coffee in our area. In my spare time I have been taking urban walks and hikes, meeting my neighbors, sampling amazing local food, reading a lot and enjoying being in the Pacific Northwest. I am looking forward to working with all of you to keep Thurston County healthy!

These are challenging times as we take on the COVID-19 pandemic together. The COVID-19 pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint, and I look forward to running it with you. We have seen our positive case numbers of COVID-19 increase over the past week. It is important to be vigilant as more businesses open and more people go back to work.

In recent days, traveling and private gatherings with family and friends are common ways people are contracting COVID-19. If you must gather, outdoors is better than indoors. The advice for preventing COVID-19 remains the same: cover your cough, wash your hands, wear a mask and stay more than six feet from people who are not part of your household when possible. I am using digital means to keep up with friends and family, limiting my travel within Thurston County and taking the opportunity to explore close to home.

As our cases rise, you may have the opportunity to meet one of our intrepid disease detectives. Our contact tracers and epidemiologists interview every person who has a positive COVID-19 test. Contact tracers try to determine how people got sick and if anyone else they encountered might be at risk of getting sick. It is really important to share the names of people with whom you have had close contact, meaning you have been closer than six feet for fifteen minutes or longer. This information is completely confidential. We only collect it so we can see who else might be sick and offer them resources. Our goal in contact tracing is to find out how people are getting sick and break the cycle.

When we know someone has been exposed, we ask them to quarantine at home for 14 days while watching for symptoms of COVID-19. This is to prevent other people from getting sick. COVID-19 can be transmitted even before people develop symptoms and know they are sick. By staying home after an exposure to COVID-19, we are doing our part to not make the people around us sick.

During the contact tracing process, one way we find out if people are having symptoms of COVID-19 is by using a technology tool called SARA. This tool sends a text message every day and offers people the opportunity to share whether they are experiencing concerning symptoms. If people develop symptoms, we can help find testing locations and make sure people have what they need during isolation and quarantine. Being able to connect by text messages allows us to help take care of more people who are at risk of becoming sick from COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge. I am excited to be here in Thurston County and to be tackling this challenge with all of you. If we all work together, we can contain this virus and work toward a safe return to public life. This means staying home when you are sick, wearing a face covering when in public, washing your hands, covering your cough, and maintaining a distance of six feet from people outside your household. If you become sick or are concerned you may have been exposed, we

can help. I am looking forward to contributing to our Thurston County community and meeting all of you from six feet away, wearing a face covering!

Wishing you the best of health,

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer, Thurston County