

Letter to the Community: July 16,2020

Hello Thurston County! Summer is here and we all need to remember to take time for ourselves, enjoy the outdoors, and recharge. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. When I am not working with our Public Health and Social Services team, I can be found walking around Capitol Lake, iced coffee in hand, enjoying the peacefulness and the view. On my walks, I am most comfortable wearing a mask, removing it only briefly to drink, and remaining at least 6 feet away from others enjoying the trail.

We are in the middle of an unprecedented challenge and we are lucky to have a community around us for support. If you are struggling, there is help. You can find resources for mental health and coping on our [website](#).

This week, we have seen a significant increase in COVID-19 cases. Many of the people who are getting sick are younger adults. This can be attributed to this age group attending more gatherings, being too close to others, and traveling throughout the state and outside of the state.

Children are also contracting COVID-19, many of these cases are a result of spread within the household. When one member of the household gets COVID-19, other family members are at an extremely high risk of contracting the disease. This is why we ask anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 to isolate themselves within their home, this means separating from other members of the household. Other members of your household should quarantine at home, which means they should not leave their homes unless making essential trips or going to medical appointments.

While children are at lower risk for developing severe diseases, cases have occurred in which children suffered from inflammation of the heart, lungs, brain, and other organ systems as a result of COVID-19 infection. We still don't know the long-term impacts of contracting the disease.

I have been reviewing cases every weekend to look for epidemiological links. The things I look for are:

- If people report coming into contact with an individual displaying symptoms of COVID-19
- If people report being a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 individual. A close contact is defined as being within six feet for more than fifteen minutes.
- If someone has engaged in high risk activities such as travel, employment with significant interpersonal contact, and attending gatherings with friends and family outside of their household.

It is important for us to know how people are getting sick so we can look at new ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 and determine what is or is not working. If you are contacted or test positive, we ask you share this information with our Disease Control and Prevention team. The key to preventing the spread of COVID-19 remains the same. Wear a face covering when outside your house, stay at least six feet away from people who are not members of your household, stay home when you are sick, and wash your hands frequently.

During my first two weeks here in Thurston County, I have seen our community come together to wear face coverings in public and encourage others to do the same. I have seen people help their neighbors who are elderly or people at high risk with essential tasks like grocery shopping. I have witnessed people going out of their way to be considerate and kind to others. It is true that our case numbers are rising and we may need to dial back to keep our community safe and healthy, but as long as we continue to

take appropriate physical distancing measures, wear face coverings, and support each other, we will come out the other side of this pandemic stronger and closer as a community.

Wishing you the best of health,

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Thurston County Health Officer