

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS 2019

(Updated July 31, 2020)

Recent updates: Updated information about schools (question 9); Updated language on face covering requirements to reflect multiple statewide orders (question 11); Updated links and clarified need for businesses to develop health and safety plans (question 12).

1. WHAT PHASE OF THE SAFE START PLAN ARE WE IN?

Snohomish County is currently in Phase 2 of the statewide [Safe Start Plan](#).

2. WHAT IS A CORONAVIRUS?

A coronavirus describes a large number of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illness. There are coronaviruses that have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Novel coronavirus 2019 is a new coronavirus, first identified in late 2019, and can cause severe illness. Other terms you may see used to name this virus include: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, or 2019-nCoV.

3. WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS?

This is a respiratory illness. Symptoms include cough, fever, sore throat, difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, and congestion or runny nose. New symptoms have been identified over time [and the CDC has a full list](#).

The degree of severity of these symptoms varies. There have been many deaths from this illness. However, most cases do not appear to be severe.

It is possible to be ill with the virus and exhibit mild symptoms or no symptoms.

4. WHERE DID THIS VIRUS COME FROM AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Like MERS and SARS, COVID-19 closely resembles coronaviruses found in bats but not humans. Scientists believe that the virus had a change in its genes that permitted it to spread to humans, possibly via an intermediate carrier (snakes) in an animal market in Wuhan, China.

The virus can be transmitted from person to person via droplets that come from the nose or mouth, especially when we cough or sneeze. Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through: the air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact like shaking hands, or touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

5. WHAT ARE RISKS FOR GETTING THE VIRUS?

The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. However, individual risk is dependent on exposure. People who are close contacts of someone with a confirmed case of the 2019 novel coronavirus are at higher risk.

6. WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS COVID?

If you are notified by public health staff (via phone call) or directly by someone who has tested positive that you are a close contact a confirmed case, you should stay home and remain quarantined there for 14 days to monitor for symptoms. Talk to your medical provider or sign up for an appointment at a drive-thru site at www.snohd.org/drive-thru-testing. If you develop symptoms or if symptoms worsen, contact your medical provider by phone or online immediately.

If someone tests positive for COVID-19, they can expect a phone call from public health. They will be asked questions like date of birth, address, gender at birth, race, and ethnicity. They may be asked about where they work and their job duties, travel history, as well as the nature and timing of the illness. They will not be asked for things like social security number, financial information, or immigration status.

Disease investigators also ask with whom an ill person had close contact. The goal is to identify people who were exposed. Public health staff or volunteers call the close contacts to notify them of possible exposure and provide guidance on how long to quarantine, what symptoms to watch for, and what to do if they become ill. Public health workers are trained and required by law to not reveal the identity of the person who may have exposed the contact, and to protect the personal health information of the people they call.

Some people are at higher risk of severe illness from the virus, including individuals who are 60 years or older and those who have underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems.

Workplaces may be notified by an employee that they are a confirmed case or close contact. [A table with general guidance for isolation and quarantine is available online](#). The employer should work with that employee to ensure needed support, such as sick leave benefits or remote work options. Additional notification may be sent to other employees in the workplace at the employer's discretion, while respecting the medical privacy of the affected employee.

7. HOW MANY COVID-19 CASES ARE THERE IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY?

Our daily update on case counts is issued at approximately 2 p.m. [on our case counts page](#) on weekdays.

We are updating confirmed and probable case numbers at the county level, and city numbers of total and recovered cases. Countywide data also is available through an interactive dashboard from the Washington State Department of Health that is accessible on the case counts page. Depending on the time of day you check the dashboard and the table, numbers may vary. Please be sure to check the "Data as of" and "Last Updated" note to confirm the most current number.

Additional information is available in weekly reports. The Health District is focusing resources on activities and data analysis that are necessary for disease prevention efforts and to move through the Safe Start Plan for Washington. This includes case investigations, monitoring metrics for quality assurance of that work, and submitting regular reports to the state under the Safe Start requirement

The Snohomish Health District receives reports of deaths associated with COVID-19 from a number of sources. These include hospitals or healthcare facilities, other state or local health jurisdictions, the Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office, or through case investigations. All death data provided are confirmed either through test results done before or after a death. There could be underlying health conditions, but COVID-19 is still considered a contributing factor.

8. ISN'T THIS VIRUS BASICALLY JUST THE FLU?

No. It is true that we lose lives every year during flu season, and that many of the same strategies for preventing the spread of flu – washing hands, disinfecting surfaces, staying home while ill – are helping us fight COVID-19. But it's crucial that you don't mix up COVID-19 and the flu.

Data indicate COVID-19 is at least 10 times more deadly than the average annual flu outbreak. We know a lot about the flu, and there's an annual flu shot as well as treatment. COVID-19 is new, and there is not yet a vaccine or proven treatment. Both are respiratory illnesses and spread in a similar way, but risk of spreading COVID-19 is higher. Our community is not immune to this disease.

9. WHAT IS THE STATUS WITH SCHOOL CLOSURES?

Schools remained closed and provided remote learning options through the end of the 2019-20 school year.

On July 29, 2020 Dr. Chris Spitters, Health Officer for the Health District, provided a recommendation that public and private schools in Snohomish County [start the fall 2020 term with distance learning](#).

Students and families should continue to monitor communications from [their local school districts](#), as well as from the Governor's office, Washington State Department of Health, and Snohomish Health District for what the next steps are for schools.

Though school-age children are generally not considered a high-risk group for severe illness from the virus, they can spread the virus and they have contact with others in the community who are at high risk. There also have been rare cases of a serious complication in children and youth related to COVID-19, called [multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children](#).

10. ARE PUBLIC GATHERINGS BEING CANCELED?

Gatherings of more than 5 people outside of your household are not allowed in Phase 2, which Snohomish County began on June 5, 2020.

As we move through the phases of the Safe Start Reopening Plan, the specific rules around gatherings will change to allow for more people. However, health and safety requirements must be followed. This includes wearing a cloth face covering, requiring frequent and easily-accessible handwashing/hand sanitizing, physical distancing of 6 feet or more between non-household members as much as possible, increased sanitizing of high-touch surfaces, and staying home if you are ill.

In general, smaller is safer for gatherings, and outdoor is better than indoor for reducing the spread of illness.

People who are at higher risk from COVID-19 and should take extra precautions include those who:

- are over 60 years of age
- have an underlying medical condition, like heart disease, lung disease or diabetes.
- have weakened immune systems

If you have questions about whether you are at higher risk from COVID-19, ask your health care provider.

11. DO PEOPLE NEED TO WEAR FACE COVERINGS/MASKS?

A [statewide public health order](#) requires people to wear a cloth facial covering in public. Separate statewide orders also require employers to ensure that [workers are wearing face coverings](#) and that [customers are wearing face coverings](#).

There is a lot of great information out there, including from the [Washington State Department of Health](#), the [Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention](#), the [Department of Labor and Industries](#), [Governor Jay Inslee](#), and [Restart's #WearAMaskWA Initiative](#). We encourage you to check out those resources and review the information below.

Face coverings are required in Snohomish County. The order is statewide. The Snohomish Health District supports the order.

12. WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS?

Many businesses have been approved to reopen, with modified operations for health and safety, as part of the Safe Start Reopening process. Businesses that are not considered essential and have not been approved to reopen under the county's current phase of the Safe Start plan can continue remote operations (employees working from home, or contact-less services) but must shut down in-person operations. Businesses that are open must ensure proper health and safety measures to prevent the spread of illness.

Allowing more businesses and activities to reopen in phases does not mean that it will be business as usual. There are guidelines that employers will need to follow **through all of the phases**. A brief overview is below, but more is outlined [in the Safe Start Plan](#).

- Limit close interactions with customers. Arrange for six-foot physical distance between employees and patrons and use other measures, such as barriers to block sneezes and coughs, if distancing isn't realistic for specific tasks.
- Ensure sanitation and hand hygiene are available to all workers and visitors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect the workspace, especially high-touch surfaces.
- Follow Labor and Industries (L&I) and industry-specific guidance regarding personal protective equipment or cloth face covers for workers.

- Encourage clients and customers to wear cloth face covers.
- Make a plan for addressing illness, including requiring ill employees to stay home and deep cleaning if an employee tests positive for COVID-19.
- Provide information to employees about COVID-19 and illness prevention. This could include signs or posters with information.
- Follow any additional guidance that is specific to your industry, as provided by local, state or federal public health professionals.

Businesses must comply with industry-specific health and safety guidance before reopening within the proper phase. The governor's office [maintains a list of guidance for industries](#).

Businesses also must have a business health and safety plan in place, and they should refer to [the template for creating a business health and safety plan to help create one](#).

More information and resources for businesses are available at www.coronavirus.wa.gov.

13. WHAT IS SOCIAL/PHYSICAL DISTANCING?

It's a common strategy for reducing the spread of disease. The closer the contact between people – and the more people in a group – the greater the risk of passing along viruses.

Try to keep at least 6 feet away from others. Stay home and reduce close contact with people outside of your household as much as possible, particularly if you or someone in your household is at higher risk or severe illness.

While in public locations indoors, or outdoors where you cannot reliably maintain a six-foot distance from others, wear a cloth face cover.

14. DOES THE HEALTH OFFICER REALLY HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO RESTRICT ACTIVITIES?

A combination of Health Officer's Orders, Governor's Orders and State Secretary of Health's Orders have been issued during this response. The Governor and Secretary of Health can issue orders for the state – including Snohomish County – and the Health Officer also has the authority to issue orders specifically for Snohomish County.

First, we do not take these measures lightly. They are carefully considered and based on the best information we have about this virus and the ability to reduce transmission. We know these rules have a large impact on our communities. However, they are crucial for the preservation of lives.

In Washington, the state Legislature enacts statutes, the Governor and state agencies enforce laws and promulgate regulations, and the courts interpret the laws.

[RCW 70.05.070](#) lays out the powers and duties of a local health officer. This includes: "Take such action as is necessary to maintain health and sanitation supervision over

the territory within his or her jurisdiction.” These measures are put in place to maintain the health of the people of Snohomish County.

15. WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?

There are currently no restrictions for who can be tested for COVID-19 in Washington. The highest priority for testing is still people with symptoms. If you are ill with any of the following symptoms, please seek testing as soon as possible.

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

The exception is if your symptom is clearly attributed to an existing condition and is not unusual for you. For example, people may experience headaches or have limited taste or smell due to existing conditions, so the symptom is not new and they do not necessarily need to be tested for COVID-19.

However, if you do experience one or more of these symptoms and they are not attributed to an existing diagnosis, get tested even if those symptoms are mild. Also, if you are not sure whether something is related to an existing condition or whether it may be a new illness, talk to your medical provider and consider getting tested for COVID-19.

People without symptoms may also need to be tested. There are a number of people who do not have symptoms but should consider testing because they are at higher risk of being asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic cases. This includes anyone who:

- Is a close contact of a confirmed case
- Lives in a congregate setting, like a shelter, group home or assisted living facility
- Works in a location that has had a case
- Is part of a family or social network that has had a case
- Works in healthcare, EMS, law enforcement or other fields with a higher risk of catching or spreading COVID-19
- Is part of a racial or ethnic group that has been disproportionately impacted by this virus in terms of rate or severity of cases (this includes people who are Black, Latinx, Native American/Alaskan Native, or Pacific Islander)
- Requires testing for employment or travel
- Requires testing prior to a medical procedure.
- People also may be tested in a healthcare setting at the discretion of their

medical provider. This could include pregnant women who are going into the hospital for labor and delivery, or people who will be participating in procedures or tests that may generate a cloud of droplets and increase risk of transmitting the virus.

The Snohomish Health District has been operating community-based, drive-thru testing sites, as well, with support from the Medical Reserve Corps and in partnership with Sno-Isle Libraries and Snohomish County Parks and Recreation. Information on new dates and times for testing, criteria to get testing, and how to register online for an appointment is available at www.snohd.org/drive-thru-testing.

Those who are being tested for COVID-19 are to remain isolated at home while results are pending. Others who live with them but are not ill will only be required to quarantine if the test results are positive.

16. WHAT IF I CAN'T GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH MY PROVIDER?

The response to COVID-19 has demanded a tremendous amount from our health care system. The role of the healthcare system in this response is diagnosis, treatment, ongoing care, and addressing individual health concerns.

Healthcare and dental providers may ask you to postpone non-urgent visits or procedures. They may also be providing tele-health options (consultations by phone or online).

For people with non-COVID health needs that are urgent, such as signs of stroke or heart attack or serious chronic conditions that require care, they should continue appointments with their medical provider and should not be afraid to seek emergency care at a hospital. Hospitals are taking measures to keep all patients healthy and safe and to prevent spread of COVID-19 to any other patients.

If your symptoms worsen, call your healthcare provider for further instructions. If you are experiencing a life-threatening situation, call 911. If you have a mask, try to put that on before first responders arrive.

17. HOW LONG IS SOMEONE CONTAGIOUS?

Based on our current understanding of this disease, symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure, and people are believed to be contagious up to two days before they become ill. Someone who is infected is most likely to spread the illness when they are actively coughing or sneezing.

It is possible for people to spread the illness when they have mild symptoms or no symptoms. It is also possible that an undetected case who self-isolates because they were exposed or are not feeling well could be contagious after their symptoms go away.

18. IS THERE A VACCINE FOR 2019 CORONAVIRUS?

At this time, there is no approved vaccine for coronavirus. Efforts are underway to develop a vaccine.

19. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK?

If you feel sick with any COVID-19 symptoms (see Question 2 above), immediately self-isolate. Stay home and away from others. Call your health care provider before going to get care and tell them about your symptoms as well as any recent travel or contact with someone who has COVID-19. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

20. HOW IS THIS VIRUS TREATED?

The large majority of people with COVID-19 recover with their own immune response. Treatment is supportive care for symptoms, fluid intake, and isolation/observation. About 10-20% of cases appear to have severe enough disease to require hospitalization. Those patients also receive supportive care and treatment for complications of the infection (pneumonia, problems breathing, etc.). Other treatment options are being studied.

21. WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT THE SPREAD?

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of standard prevention steps for respiratory illness. Continue to practice those. Increase frequency of handwashing, make sure you are cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, and stay home if you are ill. All of these are key for slowing the spread of illness.

Cloth face coverings are required in public indoor locations or outside where people cannot maintain physical distance of at least 6 feet from others. Maintaining a 6-foot distance between you and other people (social distancing) continues to be essential, and distance should be maintained even while wearing a mask whenever possible. The cloth coverings for the general public may be made from common materials at home. The public should not use surgical masks or N-95 respirators – it is crucial that we prioritize these for medical providers and first responders.

Medical providers have specific guidance on masks and personal protective equipment and should follow that guidance.

Please respect the orders and rules put in place to help reduce the spread of illness. We are relying on our community to do the right thing to keep people safe and healthy.

Set up a separate room in the household for someone who is sick and clean the room regularly. Have cloth face covers for members of the household who need to go in public, and for the sick person when they need to go into other areas of the house.

Know your neighbors or friends in the area and be ready to support each other during an emergency. Check in on those who live alone or have underlying health conditions and may need extra support. If you live alone, talk to your friends and family members about who would be available to call or message to check in on you if you become sick.

Through all of this, remember to stay calm, prepared and informed. Check

reliable sources for updates and follow the advice of public health professionals.

22. WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED OR AT HIGHER RISK?

People who have underlying conditions or are otherwise immunocompromised are at higher risk from this illness, as well as other illnesses like the flu. Avoiding contact with ill people is crucial.

If a household member of someone who is immunocompromised is suspected of having or confirmed to have coronavirus, the CDC instructs healthcare professionals and local public health staff to assess isolation options for the COVID-19 patient outside of the home so that they are not in proximity to the immunocompromised household member.

If you do not have an ill household member but are immunocompromised, talk to your healthcare provider about what steps you should take to protect yourself. Please follow your healthcare provider's guidance and keep in mind that masks are not the best option for everyone with a vulnerable immune system.

Learn what options your healthcare provider may have for remote consultations, by phone or online. This can help you get your questions answered before going into a clinic, thereby minimizing exposure to this virus as well as other illnesses.

23. SHOULD I KEEP MY KIDS HOME?

Schools are closed at this time. See Question 7 above.

Child cares are open. Child cares play a crucial role in providing care for children of workers who cannot do their jobs from home. Parents who can keep children home are encouraged to do so at this time. Fewer children at child care makes physical distancing and other health and hygiene measures easier to maintain at that child care facility.

Child care providers must meet health and safety requirements. A few highlights of those requirements are: excluding sick employees from work; sending sick children home; meeting all CDC recommended cleaning and disinfecting procedures; and ensuring proper hand hygiene and sanitation are readily available to all children and staff.

Child care providers also may make individual decisions to close due to staffing or health issues, or they may need to close or modify their operations if a staff member or child becomes ill with COVID-19.

Children or staff with symptoms of illness or who have been contacted by public health because they are a close contact of a confirmed case, should stay home and away from others. **Do not attend work, child care or other activities until 24 hours after fever has resolved and other symptoms are resolving AND 10 days after the illness began.**

24. WHY ISN'T THERE A LIST OF EXPOSURE LOCATIONS?

Coronaviruses like COVID-19 spread primarily among close contacts. They are spread through respiratory droplets when people cough or sneeze, or by touching a surface where the virus has been and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This is different from an airborne virus like measles, where we would release locations of general exposure.

If a situation arises where we know there was an exposure and we cannot identify the close contacts through disease investigation and contact tracing, public health may issue a notice for people who were at a specific event to quarantine at home and seek testing.

25. IS IT SAFE TO DONATE BLOOD?

Yes. As with any other situation, people who are ill should stay home and should not go to donate blood. However, people who are well may certainly do so. You can't catch COVID-19 from donating blood. In fact, to prevent blood supplies running low, we encourage you to donate blood.

26. IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY?

Prior to any trip, be sure to check CDC travel notices at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. The list of countries with travel notices, as well as the level of a country's notice, may change quickly.

If you are ill, avoid travel. If you are planning trips, be prepared to cancel non-essential travel and monitor alerts as the situation changes.

27. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Visit www.snohd.org/ncov2019, www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus or www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. Follow the Snohomish Health District on social media (facebook.com/SnohomishHealth, twitter.com/snohd)

A statewide hot line also has been set up at 1-800-525-0127, then press #. You can also text 211211 to get updates and resources.