



November 24, 2020

Dear Whatcom County School Superintendents:

Due to the current level and trajectory of COVID-19 transmission, I now highly recommend distance learning in all Whatcom County private and public high school and middle schools, rolling back at those schools that have phased in such instruction no later than 12/4/20. This recommendation is in accordance with *Schools – Fall 2020-2021 Guidance* (DOH, updated 10/28/20), and *Decision Tree for Provision of In Person Learning among K-12 Students at Public and Private Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (DOH, updated 10/16/20). In-person instruction and services for elementary and high-need students may continue to be provided.

Since my last update on school operations and planning on November 18, we have seen a continued steep rise in cases of COVID-19 throughout our county. As of 11/6/20, the rate was 64.2 cases in the previous 14 days per 100,000 people, with a rise to at least 134.0 on 11/15/20. In today's report, the rate has risen to at least 207.7 as of 11/20/20. Hospitalization rates are also increasing, and the health department's capacity for case investigation and contact tracing is at capacity.

On 11/16/20, statewide restrictions went into effect in order to reverse the steep incline in community transmission throughout Washington State. On 11/18/20, after consulting with Whatcom County School Superintendents, I issued a recommendation to pause the phasing-in of in-person instruction for middle and high school students, while maintaining in-person instruction for elementary school students and services for high needs children at all grades.

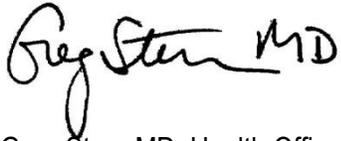
Given the increasing infection rates, the upcoming holidays, and in anticipation of further increases in rates, I do not foresee the rates returning to below 100 in the near future. The current DOH *Decision Tree* indicates that at High COVID-19 Activity Levels (greater than 75 cases in 14-days/100,000) to "Strongly recommend distance learning with the option for limited in-person learning in small groups, or cohorts, of students for the highest need students, such as students with disabilities, students living homeless, those farthest from educational justice, and younger learners."

School districts or private schools make the final decision about the level of their operations and assure their compliance with the Governor's Proclamation (most recently 20.09.2), OSPI/DOH/L&I requirements, and the DOH *K12 Guidance* and *Decision Tree*. Students designated as high need individuals can continue to have in-person instruction in small groups even during the High COVID-19 Activity Level. WCHD will continue to provide technical assistance to schools as they implement the requirements and recommendations for COVID-19 transmission control, and will take the lead and cooperate with schools in response to cases and outbreaks, provide case and contact investigation, support isolation of cases and quarantine of their close contacts, and provide documentation of when affected individuals can return to school. We will also determine whether classrooms or schools must close in response to outbreaks and when they may reopen.



We recognize the challenge to providing a safe environment for the critical educational and developmental opportunities and support services that children need and that schools must provide. It is our goal to return to a cautious, slow phased-in approach to resuming in-person learning for older students as soon as community transmission rates return to sustained safer levels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Stern MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "G" and "S".

Greg Stern MD, Health Officer

Attachment: Appendix – Requirements and References re: COVID-19 and School Operations/Planning



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REQUIREMENTS (PROCLAMATIONS, REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES)

PROCLAMATION BY THE GOVERNOR AMENDING PROCLAMATIONS 20-05, 20-08, 20-09, and 20-09.1 20-09.2 -
Phased Reopening of K-12 Schools

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/20.09.2%20COVID19%20Phased%20Reopening%20of%20K12%20Schools.pdf>

EMPLOYER HEALTH & SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL SCENARIOS, September 30, 2020
(OSPI/DOH/L&I)

<https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/Employer-Health-and-Safety-Requirements-for-SchoolScenarios.pdf>

Decision Tree for Provision of In Person Learning among K-12 Students at Public and Private Schools during the
COVID-19 Pandemic (DOH) (updated 10/16/20)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/DecisionTree-K12schools.pdf>

K-12 Schools – Fall 2020-2021 Guidance (DOH, updated 10/28/20)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/FallGuidanceK-12.pdf>

Return to Play Guidelines (WIAA, 10/6/20)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQBoiz1UnhXtci0yuLS5ekxblUiZiQyu7eHR2RovekTWHvxjGvh71hfzZW0ghd19bop3KZxjpy5Kq2/pub>

REFERENCES

Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making (CDC, updated 9/15/20)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html#thresholds>

WA COVID-19 Risk Assessment Dashboard

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/covid-19-risk-assessment-dashboard>

