

Dec. 8, 2020

A Message from the COVID Safety Team

Dear staff,

As part of our ongoing work to keep you informed about COVID safety practices and protocols we will be sharing regular updates. Each update will include the latest information from local and regional agencies as well as stories and resources within our district.

We will start this week's update with a celebration and sign of hope for 2021. One the [first public vaccines for COVID-19 was given today in England](#).

Bellingham Public Schools links

1. [NEW COVID-19 Dashboard](#)
2. [Staff Handbook for COVID-19 Protocols and Guidelines](#) (updated Dec. 2)
3. A reminder that these and other resources are available at our [staff COVID information webpage](#).

Center for Disease Control (CDC) update

The CDC announced [Options to Reduce Quarantining for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing](#), which the Washington state Department of Health (DOH) updated in [K-12 School Guidance](#) (p.13). Our local health department has not changed its guidance for schools at this time. Currently, close contact quarantine remains 14 days.

Whatcom County data and updates

1. Whatcom County has an increasing trajectory of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Increases continue to be connected to households, informal gatherings, and some workplace spread in isolated incidents.
2. Check out the [Whatcom County Health Department Data Dashboard](#) for regularly updated local COVID-19 data.
3. [Whatcom County COVID-19 testing information](#)

PPE update for our staff

Our district's supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) remains stable, but there are supply chain challenges worldwide. Fortunately, we have PPE sourcing superstars working every day to make sure we have ongoing supplies. It is our top priority that every staff member is adequately protected.

Due to job demands, some staff are at greater risk of exposure than others, and we ask that all staff be mindful of supply chain challenges when requesting and using PPE. Please do not take more than is necessary to get through the week.

If you have questions about what PPE you should be using, your school nurse is always available to help answer questions and determine what is right for you based on public health guidance.

Resources to help determine appropriate PPE :

1. [Employer Health & Safety Requirements for School Scenarios](#) from Washington state’s departments of labor and industries (L&I), Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction (OSPI), and DOH
2. Page 2 has helpful key points summarizing PPE based on risk level
3. Pages 8 – 11 is an overview of PPE requirements for school-specific scenarios.
 - a. The guidance provides a range of PPE options based on risk level. We work to acquire PPE based on this list and sustainable supply chains. Based on L&I guidance, KN95 and three-ply procedural masks offer equivalent protection and are interchangeable for many situations. L&I also considers most classrooms to be low to medium-risk settings, requiring a cloth face mask or a cloth face mask and a face shield.
4. [Which Mask for the Task](#) is a useful, simple reference tool for PPE usage.



If you are concerned about a specific situation or student, contact your school nurse.
We are in this together.



Remember that some of our best mitigation tools are distance and time. Try to maintain at least six feet of distance whenever possible and minimize the amount of time you spend within six feet of others. Work with your administrator and school nurse to problem solve

situations. It is by combining all safety requirements that we reduce COVID-19 transmission risk in our schools.

Visualizations of different kinds of masks vs. no mask

1. [Visualization of mask testing from Duke Health](#) – comparison occurs around 2 minutes
2. [Visualization of mask testing from University of New South Wales, Australia](#)

Tabletop Exercises

Since the summer, our school nurses have been engaged in “tabletop exercises” where they challenge themselves to navigate hypothetical COVID-19 scenarios in order to be more prepared for the many unique situations all our staff are encountering. Our nurses develop a scenario, work through the health care steps they would recommend and connect with the Whatcom County Health Department to confirm their learning. Our nurses would like to share what they are working on with colleagues to increase our collective understanding of best practices when responding to reports of illness during this pandemic.

Here are some important definitions to increase our collective health literacy:

- **Exposure** or **contact** is usually defined as being within six feet or more and spending 15 minutes or longer with someone who has tested positive for COVID.
- **Quarantine** is when someone is asked to stay home due to exposure to someone who is infected, because they could become contagious.
- **Isolation** is when someone is asked to stay home because of illness or possible illness, and they are contagious.
- One confirmed case is not an outbreak. An **outbreak** is defined as two or more cases with transmission occurring between them.

Example Tabletop Exercise: Two students met for an afternoon at a local park. They played outside, wore masks, and sat and chatted on a park bench together for about an hour. That night, one of the two students didn't feel well. The ill child went and got a COVID-19 test, which was returned positive. What would the second child be asked to do and why?

If you would like to respond, please submit answers to BPS.health@bellingshamschools.org by Friday, Dec. 11. Next week we'll share the response from our nurses and health department representatives.

***correction from last week: We are sorry we didn't include two in-person programs in our list! Middle school internet cafés started on Nov. 5 and some elementary school internet cafés started on Nov. 16. View all in-person programs on our [COVID-19 Dashboard webpage](#) under “Who is receiving in-person instruction in our schools?”*