

Follow-up from 12/16 Press Conference with Gov. Inslee

Dear Superintendents:

In a [press conference focused on school reopening today](#), Governor Inslee outlined our shared expectation that schools begin phasing in in-person learning. He also announced updates to the school reopening decision tree, now renamed [Toolkit to Prepare for In-Person Learning](#). A high-level summary of the changes is included below.

Today, the Governor shared new data and research showing schools are reopening safely. You may remember that our state has some of the most stringent health and safety requirements for schools in the nation, and the data now show those protocols are working.

When the Department of Health (DOH) created the decision tree this fall, they were cautious with their recommendations because they did not have much relevant state and national data from schools that had reopened.

From the beginning of September through December 12th, 266 cases representing 84 outbreaks have been tied to K–12 schools in Washington state. It is important to note that an outbreak is defined as 2 or more cases in a 14-day period, and the median number of cases linked to K–12 outbreaks is 2.

This early data from our state, as well as data from across the nation, show that rigorous health and safety measures can limit the transmission of COVID-19 in the school environment.

As you plan to phase in in-person learning, you are strongly encouraged to prioritize students in grades pre-K through 5, as well as students who would benefit most from in-person support.

In addition to the changes to the Toolkit to Prepare for In-Person Learning, the Governor also announced today that his office will make a \$3 million investment in local school safety supports. The funds will be provided to districts and may be used to form a local safety committee, purchase a third-party safety audit, or another activity that will assist your district in adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols.

Finally, the Governor and DOH announced [new guidance on testing](#) as well as their intention to expand testing in schools for both students and educators.

Summary of Changes to the Decision Tree/Toolkit to Prepare for In-Person Learning (Summary Provided by DOH):

- The Department of Health (DOH) revised the metrics to inform local decisions around the provision of in-person learning and the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in school environments. These revisions were based on emerging research and data gathered by state and national officials.
- These changes include revisions to the COVID-19 incidence rates to consider when making decisions about who to prioritize in-person learning for and further clarification that local leaders should consider test positivity and trends in cases and hospitalizations to inform decisions around in person learning.

- DOH defined a maximum ‘small group’ size of 15 for learning when disease activity is high and defined our ‘youngest learners’.
- DOH moved away from a ‘decision tree.’ This toolkit now includes two checklists that ensure readiness to implement all required DOH Health and Safety Measures and L&I requirements, and a matrix that summarizes our recommendations for the provision of in-person learning based on the community’s metrics. The introduction and background sections were updated to reflect the rationale for the changes.

We know moving in this direction requires strong partnerships between district administration, labor, and communities as a whole. We see good examples of this all over the state right now. We are committed to continuing our work to share information as we receive it and to providing you with tools and resources to reopen safely.

Thank you for your continued dedication to your students, staff, and communities. This work is far from easy, and your leadership during these extraordinary times has been exceptional.

Chris