

Feb. 4, 2021

## *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.

**Today's topics:** Whatcom County case data, COVID-19 variants and masking, a wellness check-in and links to previous newsletters.

### Whatcom County data

Cases continue to decrease after a mid-January high. You can see preliminary and completed case data by viewing the [Whatcom County Health Department COVID-19 Data](#) and scrolling down to the Whatcom County Risk Assessment Dashboard. The second tab is COVID-19 disease activity, which displays cases per 100,000 people. In the lower left, click tabular view for a list of dates and associated cases.

As of Feb. 4, the risk assessment dashboard reported the following COVID-19 rates per 100,000 people:

Completed case data	Jan. 10 through Jan. 23	406.6 cases/100,000 people
Preliminary case data	Jan. 20 through Feb. 2	325.8.0 cases/100,000 people

### [Whatcom County COVID-19 testing information](#)

### COVID-19 Variants

There have been three COVID-19 variants circulating globally, one from the United Kingdom (UK), one from South Africa and one from Brazil. The UK variant has been detected in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Our health department is continuing to work with local labs to monitor for any variant COVID-19 strains, as of now no variants have been detected in Whatcom County. [Read what is known about all three variants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\).](#)

### Masking

At this time the CDC has not changed its [mask recommendations](#). Our federal, state and local authorities have not changed their guidance on mask wearing either, but we know more layers of fabric offer more filtration against virus particles. The fewer virus particles that someone is exposed to means they are less likely to contract COVID-19. This is true for both the variants and the non-variant.

We encourage staff to use the guidance in the [staff handbook](#) (see page 7) as a starting place to determine which PPE is right for you. You can also check in with your site COVID Safety Team for additional support. KN95 and procedural masks are available if you need them.

We continue to work with our local health department to update guidance in response to any changes. Currently, the Whatcom County Health Department [advises that people continue to strictly stick to current health guidance](#).

- Wear a mask or face covering whenever out in public.
- Wash your hands often.
- Watch your distance - stay six feet away from people you don't live with at all times.
- Limit the size and frequency of your social gatherings.
- Stay home and away from others if you have symptoms of COVID-19, except to get medical care.
- Contact your healthcare provider or a community-based testing site to get tested if you develop symptoms.
- If public health calls or texts you, please answer. Follow their advice to protect yourself and those around you.

## Wellness check-in

It has been over a year since the first confirmed COVID-19 case arrived in Washington state. At the time COVID-19 seemed like something distant that would not affect us. Then it affected us but hope seemed right around the corner "we'll be back after spring break" turned into "we'll be back for graduation" to "we'll be back next year". Here we are now, with vaccines starting to trickle in, still hoping and waiting. It can be exhausting.

Most people working in education have had to entirely reinvent how they do their jobs multiple times over. The result of all this is that collectively we are all experiencing a great deal of stress for a sustained period. As educators, we know that sustained stress affects our ability to learn and adapt.

There are many things beyond our control, and the collective stress may stay with us for some time. It is important that each of us create the space to reflect on how sustained stress is impacting ourselves, our relationships, and our work. Are there things you can let go of? Things you can prioritize? We talk a lot about self-care, but what does that look like for you?

Visit our [Mental Health and Wellness page](#) for a list of available resources and access counseling through the [employee assistance program](#). If you are in need of crisis resources, do not hesitate to call any of the [resources on the Whatcom County Health Department crisis care list](#). Breathe deep, take care of yourself and those around you, and hang in there.

Other resources: [COVID-19 and Coping with Stress](#), [COVID's Mental-Health Toll: How Scientists are Tracking a Surge in Depression](#), [Managing Stress During COVID-19](#)

## Bellingham Public Schools links

You can find previous staff newsletters under COVID-19 Info on the Bellingham Public Schools website. They are located under [Staff Resources](#).

- [Dec. 1, 2020](#)
- [Dec. 8, 2020](#)
- [Dec. 15, 2020](#)
- [Jan. 6, 2021](#)
- [Jan. 7, 2021](#)
- [Jan. 19, 2021](#)
- [Jan. 20, 2021](#)

- [Feb. 1, 2021](#)

If you have questions about COVID-19 information from the school district you can email [BPS.health@bellingshamschools.org](mailto:BPS.health@bellingshamschools.org)

If you have questions about COVID-19 information from Whatcom County Health Department you can email [covid@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:covid@co.whatcom.wa.us)