

March 12, 2020

Category: News Release

Release Date: For Immediate Release

Regarding: Public Health Recommendations for COVID-19

From: Dr. Samuel Artzis, Health Officer
Northeast Tri County Health District

On March 11, 2020, Governor Inslee issued a Proclamation to minimize COVID-19 (Coronavirus) exposure, particularly in counties hit hardest by the virus. Starting March 11, 2020, *events that take place in King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties with more than 250 people are prohibited by the state.* This order applies to gathering for social, spiritual, and recreational activities. This includes but is not limited to: community, civic, public, leisure, faith-based, or sporting events; parades; concerts; festivals; conventions; fundraisers and similar activities.

“This is an unprecedented public health situation and we can’t wait until we’re in the middle of it to slow it down. We’ve got to get ahead of the curve. One main defense is to reduce the interaction of people in our lives.” – Governor Inslee

Currently, COVID-19 has been confirmed in many Washington locations, including in eastern Washington, and has resulted in 29 deaths. There is confirmed significant community spread in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. While areas of northeastern Washington are not currently experiencing known community transmission, we want to take sensible action to slow the spread of the illness. Therefore, Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) is **urging and recommending** residents of Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties **voluntarily** follow Governors Inslee’s proclamation and **reduce large gatherings** until further notice. While this applies to events of 250 individuals or more, we are also recommending this for:

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stevens County - 240 E. Dominion, Colville, WA 99114 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ferry County - 147 N. Clark, PO Box 584, Republic, WA 99166 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administration Phone: 509-684-2262 , Fax: 509-684-1002 | Phone: 509-775-3111 , Fax: 509-775-2858 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Phone: 509-684-2262 , Fax: 509-684-9878 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Health Phone: 509-684-2262 , Fax: 509-684-8506 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pend Oreille County - 605 Highway 20, Newport, WA 99156 |
| | Phone: 509-447-3131 , Fax: 509-447-5644 |

- Any gathering where indoor social distancing is not possible
- Regional events where attendees come from multiple locations from outside of the area
- Where vulnerable populations would be the majority of attendees

NETCHD is firmly recommending this proactive step to minimize exposure to COVID-19 for our residents and to lessen the impact it has on our communities. We recognize and understand the substantial impact these actions can have on our residents and communities. We have carefully weighed the risks and benefits of this recommendation. These actions are the most effective tools we have available to help slow the spread of the virus in our communities and protect our vulnerable residents.

Alternatives

If you are hosting an event or gathering, please consider the following alternatives:

- Utilize available technology options (e.g. livestreaming, virtual meetings), or
- Cancel or postpone the event until these recommendations have been lifted

If you have plans to attend an upcoming event or gathering, we encourage you not attend to protect yourself, your family, and the people you come in contact with on a daily basis.

Events and Gatherings

If event organizers make decisions to hold events, they should ensure the following:

- To the extent possible, before the event, notify attendees not to attend if they are ill or if they are a vulnerable population (60 years of age or have chronic medical conditions)
- Post signage at the time of the event regarding not entering the event if ill or are a vulnerable population
- Recommendations for social distancing and limiting close contact are met
- Employees or volunteers leading an event are screened for symptoms each day
- Proper hand washing, sanitation, and cleaning is readily available
- Environmental cleaning guidelines are followed (e.g., clean and disinfect high touch surfaces daily or more frequently)

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

Remember to take every day preventative action to slow the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water; if unavailable, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing

- Avoid large gatherings and close contact (less than 6 feet away) with others
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces
- Stay home and away from others if you are sick

Schools

At this point, we are not recommending closing schools, but we are watching the outbreak closely and may determine that school closures are necessary. **Schools should take steps now to prepare for the possibility of prolonged mandatory closures.**

In particular, schools should plan for how to continue to provide non-educational supports for their students such as providing food, developmental disability supports, and school-based healthcare.

Collective Action Can Save Lives

We all have people in our lives who are high-risk. We all are one mishap away from needing access to a functioning hospital. We all have a lot at stake.

Canceling or postponing social events has consequences, both personal and financial, and is not an easy decision. However, if we can slow the spread of COVID-19, lives will be saved; especially the most vulnerable in our community. A unified effort will prevent the spread and benefits the whole community.

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