

May 4, 2020

CATEGORY: News Release

RELEASE DATE: For Immediate Release

REGARDING: COVID-19 Stay Home Order and County Variance Requests

On May 1st, Governor Inslee announced the extension of the stay home order until the end of May. With approximately 200-250 new cases occurring daily throughout Washington, the decision was made to extend the existing order that was due to expire May 4th but, in the process, look for ways to reopen some areas before May 31st.

In the plan that was announced on Friday, reopening businesses and social functions will be rolled out in four phases. Each phase would be spaced minimally three weeks apart to allow public health officials the opportunity to monitor for new cases. It is highly likely that more time between phases will be needed to ensure there is not increases in disease transmission rates.

An important aspect of the reopening plan allows counties (with a population of less than 75,000) with no cases occurring within the preceding three weeks to May 4th, the option to request a variance to move to Phase 2 before the rest of the state. Ferry County and Pend Oreille County met the preliminary criteria for that option. The last confirmed case of COVID-19 occurred March 17th in Ferry County and April 13th in Pend Oreille County.

The Governor also indicated other counties could apply for the variance in the next two weeks if the same criteria were met. For Stevens County, the last positive case was April 20th. If there were no other cases, Stevens could be eligible to move to Phase 2 on May 11th.

This variance process involves Northeast Tri County Health District completing a plan to demonstrate readiness in the healthcare system status, testing capacity and availability, case and contact investigations, and ability to protect high-risk populations. Staff at the Health District are currently working to put together this information and will submit it to Washington State Department of Health as soon as possible.

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The variance request also requires our local board of health endorsement of the plan. A special Northeast Tri County Health District Board of Health meeting has been scheduled for Monday, May 4th at 1:00 p.m. to discuss the request and take possible action. Local hospitals will also need to verify they can meet readiness indicators and have the capacity to serve all people needing their care. Lastly, the Commissioners in each of our three counties need to vote affirmatively to adopt the alternative plan in place of the statewide “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. County variance applications will be approved or denied by the Secretary of Health.

In preparation for reopening, staff at Northeast Tri County Health District have put together packets with information and resources businesses may use to ensure they are following the guidelines recommended for reopening. Each business is going to be different in how they implement these guidelines based on their size, facility, and product. The Health District is available to review safety plans or provide resources to locate personal protective equipment or cleaning supplies for your businesses. Please contact our Environmental Health Department at 509-684-2262, option #2 if you have questions or concerns regarding the recommended guidelines.

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