

May 5, 2020

**CATEGORY:** News Release

**RELEASE DATE:** For Immediate Release

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

Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) Board of Health held a special meeting on May 4, 2020 to discuss the Stay Home Order and county variance requests. A four-phased approach was introduced by the Governor on May 1, 2020. While much of the state will continue with the extension of the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order until May 31<sup>st</sup>, Ferry and Pend Oreille Counties did meet the preliminary criteria to apply for a variance request to move to Phase 2, sooner than the rest of the state. To meet these criteria, counties had to have:

- A population of less than 75,000
- No identified residents with COVID-19 for the past three weeks

While Stevens County was just shy of meeting the preliminary criteria, with the last positive case being reported April 20, 2020, Stevens County will be included in the request for variance submitted. If the Washington State Department of Health approves the variance request, Stevens County would be eligible to move to Phase 2 on May 11, 2020.

The process to apply for a variance to move to Phase 2 before other parts of the state require:

- A signed recommendation from the local public health officer to the local board of health
- A vote from the local board of health to move forward with the variance request
- Letter from local hospitals certifying they have adequate bed capacity to serve their community and adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies to keep their workers safe
- Request from county commissioners to move to Phase 2

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On May 4<sup>th</sup>, NETCHD Health Officer Dr. Sam Artzis presented his signed letter of recommendation supporting the move to Phase 2. The letter addressed our local counties, healthcare system readiness, testing capacity and ability to protect high risk populations. He also presented other variables to consider when moving ahead with a regional approach including case numbers, hospital capacity, emergency management systems, surge plan, lab capacity, and assessing our regional numbers. He indicated assessments of these variables will be done daily and if they do arise, it will be handled with great caution.

We have been quickly working to get the necessary materials together to get the variance request submitted for Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties as soon as possible. NETCHD has been working with local hospitals to obtain letters certifying their bed capacity and PPE supplies. The NETCHD Board of Health voted in approval of moving forward with the variance request, which will then move to the County Commissioners for approval to move to Phase 2. After all materials are collected, they will be submitted to the Washington State Department of Health Secretary John Wiesman, who will approve or deny the requests.

It is hopeful that the application for variance will be submitted as early as today in efforts to expedite this process. In the meantime, we ask that businesses follow the guidance outlined in Phase 1 and as community members we continue to do our part to social distance, wear cloth masks when in public and wash our hands frequently. It is also important that high-risk populations (persons 65 years and older, people of all ages with underlying medical conditions) continue being cautious and avoid unnecessary trips out of their homes.

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