

Public Health news and blog

Update: New state and local Orders issued to protect residents' health from COVID-19

March 11, 2020

Today, Governor Jay Inslee ordered the prohibition of gatherings of more than 250 people in King County and other western Washington counties. In addition, Dr. Jeff Duchin, Health Officer for Public Health – Seattle & King County, issued a parallel local Health Officer Order for King County to prohibit gatherings of fewer than 250 people unless measures are taken by event organizers to minimize risk.

Governor and Local Health Officer Orders

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In addition, he ordered the prohibition of gatherings of fewer than 250 people unless measures are taken by event organizers to minimize risk.

Under this local health officer Order, an "event" is defined as a public gathering for business, social, or recreational activities including, but not limited to, community, civic, public, leisure, or sporting events; parades; concerts; festivals; conventions; fundraisers; and similar activities, unless event organizers take steps to minimize risk. Specifically, organizers of events of fewer than 250 people must ensure that:

- Older adults and individuals with underlying medical conditions that are at increased risk of serious COVID-19 are encouraged not to attend (including employees);
- Social distancing recommendations must be met (i.e., limit contact of people within 6 feet from each other for 10 minutes or longer);
- Employees must be screened for coronavirus symptoms each day and excluded if symptomatic;
- Proper hand hygiene and sanitation must be readily available to all attendees and employees; and
- Environmental cleaning guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are followed (e.g., clean and disinfect high touch surfaces daily or more frequently).

At this time, retail businesses and service operators such as grocery stores, drug stores, movie theaters, restaurants, other retail establishments may continue to provide services as long as they take steps to minimize the spread of disease. Additional guidance will be issued and posted on www.kingcounty.gov/COVID.

Schools should be planning for potential closures for extended periods of time and should be determining now how to continue to provide nutritional, medial and other services for children who need it.

The Health Officer's Order goes into effect today, March 11, 2020, and has no specified end date.

Why this Health Officer Order was issued

COVID-19 is spreading in King County, with hundreds of cases having been reported to date. We expect the case count to double every 5–7 days. The public health approach is focusing on community mitigation to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are asking individuals, businesses, schools, and healthcare providers to take steps to help.

We have also released [guidance for anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 and their contacts on how to prevent the spread to others](#). The goals for using mitigation strategies for communities with local COVID-19 transmission are to protect:

- Individuals at risk for severe illness, including older adults **and people of any age** with underlying health conditions
- The healthcare workforce and critical infrastructure workforces so that sick people can be treated and other aspects of the community can continue to function

It's critical to minimize the number of people who get seriously ill at the same time. If too many people get sick all at once, this will put too much of a burden on our health care system. If that happens, people at highest risk – people over 60, and with underlying health conditions – may not be able to get the care they need if they get seriously ill.

Most of us won't get seriously ill. But we need to make sure those who are at risk for serious illness are able to get the care they need.

About enforcement

Our initial community mitigation strategies have been well-accepted, and we believe these new actions will be accepted in the same way to protect our community's health. We don't believe active enforcement will be necessary. For the King County Order, violating a Local Health Officer Order is a misdemeanor. Our focus will be on helping people understand the importance of avoiding gatherings of people, rather than citations. We will not be actively searching for violations, but if we receive reports of events contrary to the order, we will reach out to the organizer to educate and provide guidance.

Case updates

Public Health – Seattle & King County is reporting the following confirmed cases and deaths due to COVID-19 through 11:59 p.m. on 3/10/20

- 234 confirmed cases (up 44 from yesterday)
- 26 confirmed deaths (up 4 from yesterday)

The four deaths being reported today were all among previously reported cases. These additional deaths include:

- A woman in her 90s, Life Care Center resident, died on 3/3.
- A man in his 90s, Life Care Center resident, hospitalized at EvergreenHealth, died on 3/5.
- A woman in her 60s, Life Care Center resident, hospitalized at EvergreenHealth, died on 3/9.
- A woman in her 90s, a resident of Redmond Care and Rehab, hospitalized at EvergreenHealth, died on 3/10.

Of the 26 deaths reported, 22 are associated with Life Care Center.

Isolation and quarantine facilities update

For those who cannot self-isolate or quarantine in their own home and for those who do not have a home, King County is creating isolation and quarantine sites at multiple locations. Quarantine is for people who are not currently showing symptoms but are at increased risk for having been exposed to an infectious disease. Isolation is used for people who are currently ill and able to spread the disease and who need to stay away from others in order to avoid infecting them.

Individuals who may temporarily stay in these locations may include people who do not have a separate bedroom in their home away from a family member who is elderly or medically fragile, students in congregate dormitory settings, or persons experiencing homelessness.

The first resident of King County needing a safe place for isolation and quarantine has been admitted to the facility in Kent. Individuals can only be placed into these sites after a health professional with Public Health - Seattle & King County has determined that they need isolation or quarantine.

The number of persons in King County's isolation and quarantine sites will be included in regular updates provided by Public Health - Seattle & King County. No other identifying or personal information will be provided.

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