



Grays Harbor County Public Health Department

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Grays Harbor School Superintendents and College President,

In the month of July Grays Harbor County's COVID-19 cases increased by 55, exceeding the Washington State goal of 25 cases/100,000 people in a two-week period. The role of Public Health is to encourage people to follow practices that reduce the spread of COVID-19, conduct disease investigations, and provide specific actions to those who have COVID-19 to assist in disrupting the further spread of COVID-19. Even with these actions in place, disease activity in Grays Harbor County has increased.

Studies show that schools play an incredibly important role in healthy growth and development. I understand that whether or not to operate schools in-person is a very difficult decision that schools must make. I also understand that you are reviewing the same science and guidance that is available to all of us at this time, and that the science of COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. On July 13, 2020, the Institute for Disease Modeling released the report, "Schools are not islands: we must mitigate community transmission to reopen school." Their investigators' modeling shows that if community mobility and disease spread were too high, none of the mitigating strategies (face cloth coverings, physical distancing, strong hygiene practices, cohorting, etc.) that schools could implement would be able to reduce the risk of spread to a sustainable level.

At this time, the disease spread of COVID-19 in Grays Harbor County is around 1.5 times the current goal of 25 cases per 100,000 people in a two-week period. Due to this level of local disease activity, it is my recommendation that Grays Harbor K-12 schools and Grays Harbor College start the school year with a distance learning model, or in special circumstances, a hybrid model. Some schools with small numbers and the facilities (i.e., large physical spaces) and staffing capacity, may be able to offer limited in-person instruction or a hybrid model, if administration can ensure that safety measures, as outlined by Washington State Department of Health K-12 Schools Fall 2020-2021 Guidance, or College specific guidance from Governor Inslee's Office or Washington State Department of Health, are implemented with strict adherence. If schools implement some in-person or a hybrid model, we encourage schools to prioritize grades K-5 and special educational services, and utilize remote learning models for older grades.

As a community, regardless of whether in-person or remote school operations are in place, each one of us can take action to reduce disease spread. Everyone should stay home when you are sick, wash your hands with soap and water often, stay at least 6 feet away from people you do not live with, and wear a cloth face covering, if you can, at all times in public spaces. If we all follow these practices, we can disrupt the current community spread of COVID-19, at which time schools may be able to increase in-person activities.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Bausher
Grays Harbor County Health Officer