

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT:**

Heather Thomas, 425.508.4980  
[hthomas@snohd.org](mailto:hthomas@snohd.org)

**Continued Air Quality Concerns, Recommendations for Schools, and COVID-19 Testing**

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. – In addition to continuing to protect communities against COVID-19, there are life-threatening fires throughout the state. Some of our neighbors have had to save their lives by leaving their homes, and hoping the fire spares their property. Many are struggling with the poor air quality from wildfire smoke.

The [Puget Sound Clean Air Agency has listed current air conditions as “unhealthy” for all](#), and may worsen to “very unhealthy” as Friday continues. While air quality is unhealthy, everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects. If air quality reaches very unhealthy, everyone may experience more serious health effects.

When there is smoke in the air, and especially for individuals who are reacting to the smoke already, there are some things to do to stay safe:

- Stay indoors, with just household members. Remember, it is much easier to spread COVID-19 indoors than it is outdoors. Smoke can also make people more susceptible to respiratory infections like COVID-19. Protect family members from the smoke by staying inside and from COVID-19 by delaying small get-togethers until the air quality improves enough for everyone to be comfortably outside.
- Reduce outdoor physical activity. Save walks, jogs, and yard work for a day when the air quality is better.
- Keep indoor air clean.
  - Close windows and doors to reduce intake of smoke. Open them back up again when the air quality is good to refresh the air.
  - [Improve filtration of indoor air](#) in the home and [create a clean air room](#) where you spend most of your time. A DIY [box fan filter](#) can improve indoor air quality in a single room. Filtering indoor air is an effective way to reduce fine particles from wildfire smoke.
  - Avoid doing anything that may contribute to smoke or dust in the air, like burning candles or incense, smoking inside, frying or broiling, or vacuuming.
- Keep wearing cloth face covering to protect yourself and others from COVID-19; unfortunately, they don't help that much with smoke.

Stay informed about current and forecasted air quality on the [Washington Smoke Information blog](#) and the [Puget Sound Clean Air Agency](#). For more information, visit DOH's Smoke from Fires [webpage](#).

**Updated Recommendations for Schools**

In light of ongoing moderate but declining COVID-19 transmission, Dr. Chris Spitters has provided updated recommendations to public and private K-12 schools in Snohomish County. The guidance is based on the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH's) [Decision Tree](#)

[for In-Person Learning](#) framework for proceeding forward, while deferring to schools on how to best serve their students within that general framework and statewide guidelines.

“A reasonable next step is for schools to begin planning for how to expand in-person learning to elementary school students, as well as to any high needs students in any grade level not already receiving in-person services,” said Dr. Spitters. “This does not mean schools should immediately go to full, in-person attendance in all elementary school settings.”

Schools have been asked to wait for at least three weeks to allow observation following both the Labor Day holiday and the re-opening of schools in their current configuration. If at that time COVID-19 activity in the school and community remains stable or improving, and the schools feel prepared, then they can proceed with bringing elementary school students back incrementally for in-person learning.

After one group of students have resumed in-person learning, schools should allow for at least three weeks before bringing in the next group. This allows some time to detect any impacts to disease transmission prior to making the next move in a planned sequence. Local conditions, resources, and other factors within the school’s domain may lead a school or district to decide to move slower than this framework allows for.

Aside from middle or high school students receiving support services in small, cohorted groups, it is not recommended that middle and high school students return to in-person learning at this time. The Health District finds that teenage students:

- have higher rates of COVID-19 than younger children;
- are probably more likely to spread COVID-19 if infected; and
- as a group, appear to face fewer challenges in remote learning.

Aside from special- or high-needs students, middle and high school students should remain in remote or distance learning for the time being. If elementary school students are able to return to in-person learning in a safe and stable manner, maintaining similar or better COVID-19 circumstances overall, then the Health District will update these recommendations to address in-person learning for middle and high school students.

In line with DOH guidance, the Health District continues to recommend against holding school-based extracurricular activities in-person until all students have had at least some access to in-person learning, and COVID-19 activity in the community is otherwise so permitting.

“It is inevitable that cases will occur in students and school staff as we bring more people together, but a case is not a failure on the school or district,” adds Dr. Spitters. “We all must be prepared and ready to respond in a coordinated and sustainable fashion.”

For more information on the updated recommendations for schools, please see this summary: [Considerations to Inform Schools’ Planning for Return to In-Person Learning](#)

### **COVID-19 Testing Schedule**

The Snohomish Health District had to close testing for much of the week due to poor air quality. Below is the current schedule for the week of September 14, which is subject to change if conditions do not improve.

The Health District is continuing testing at 3900 Broadway in Everett:

- Monday, September 14 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Tuesday, September 15 from noon to 7 p.m.
- Wednesday, September 16 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Thursday, September 17 from noon to 7 p.m.
- Friday, September 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

In addition to the Everett site, the Health District will also be offering testing at the Lynnwood Food Bank on Tuesday, Sept 15. Appointments will be available from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 5320 176<sup>th</sup> St SW.

COVID-19 testing is available to anyone, and strongly encouraged for individuals that fit the following criteria:

- Anyone with any of the following COVID-19 symptoms (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headaches, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea); or
- Close contact of a confirmed case; or
- Anyone who lives or works in a congregate setting; or
- Work in healthcare, EMS, law enforcement or other fields where work settings have a higher risk of catching or spreading COVID-19; or
- Part of a family or social network that has had a case.

Registration is now open at [www.snohd.org/drive-thru-testing](http://www.snohd.org/drive-thru-testing). Insurance information is collected and the lab will bill insurance. There are no co-pays for COVID-19 testing. If you do not have insurance, the test will be provided at no charge.

The community is encouraged to help prevent the spread of illness and to support the response to this outbreak by staying informed and sharing reliable information. This is a very fluid situation and information will be updated at [www.snohd.org/ncov2019](http://www.snohd.org/ncov2019) and the Health District's social media channels.

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