

Q&A: MEASURES TO MINIMIZE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN THE COMMUNITY

Background: On Wednesday, March 4, 2020, King County made the following recommendations to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community:

- People in high risk groups (people 60+, people with underlying health conditions, and people who are pregnant) stay home and avoid crowded settings as much as possible.
- Employers are asked to have employees telecommute whenever possible. Public Health recommends that employers take steps to maximize telecommuting options where possible. We also recommend that employers consider staggering start and end times to reduce the numbers of people on mass transit at the same time.
- Community groups are asked to postpone large gatherings whenever possible.
- Try to avoid close contact as much as possible. Close contact is defined as closer than 6 feet, but if that's not possible, trying to stay an arm's length away.

When do these recommendations go into effect and for how long?

These recommendations go into effect immediately. We're recommending these proactive steps through March to slow the spread of novel coronavirus. We will continue to evaluate the situation day-by-day and keep everyone up to date about any changes to these recommendations.

Who is in a "high risk" group?

- People who are 60 or older
- People with underlying medical conditions, such as heart disease, lung disease and diabetes
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who are pregnant.

Anyone who has questions about whether their condition puts them at risk for severe illness as a result of novel coronavirus should consult with their healthcare provider.

I am not in a high risk group – do I need to follow these recommendations?

If you are sick, please stay home from work. We are encouraging employers to maximize flexibility in sick leave.

We also recommend that everyone avoid crowded settings as much as possible.

Eighty percent of cases do not cause serious illness, but everyone has a role to play in keeping our community healthy.

Who do these recommendations apply to?

These recommendations apply to everybody in King County. Everyone has a role to play in keeping our community healthy. Specifically for people at high risk for serious illness, we are recommending they stay home and avoid crowded settings as much as possible.

We also recognize that not everyone will be able to take all of these precautions. These are recommendations, not requirements.

What's the point of doing this now? Why are we making this decision?

We recognize that we are the first in the nation to issue such recommendations in response to novel coronavirus, and this decision was not made lightly. Health officials weighed the potential benefits for community health along with the significant impacts that these recommendations could have on our community. In consultation with the CDC, we developed these recommendations based on the rising number of cases in our community and the importance of taking these actions now to help slow further spread of the disease.

How confident are you that it's not already widespread in the community?

Novel coronavirus is here and will continue to spread throughout the community. We expect that there will be more cases identified in the days and weeks to come.

These recommendations are meant to slow the spread of novel coronavirus in our community and reduce the number of people infected.

Why are you not closing schools?

We are not recommending closing schools at this time. If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19, Public Health will work with the school and the district to determine the best measures including potential school closure. As much as possible, children should be allowed to carry on with their education and normal activities.

We know that schools are doing the important work of educating our children and we don't want to disrupt that. We also know that school closures have other impacts on working parents. In addition, school closures can be disruptive and costly for families, and we consider both the potential benefits and negative consequences of closures when we make recommendations.

Children with underlying health conditions may be at higher risk. In these cases, caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with their healthcare providers about whether children should stay home.

Why are you not shutting down mass transit?

Mass transit is an essential service that many people in our community rely on to get to work, school, and to meet essential needs. At this time, we do not believe it is necessary to shut down transit.

However, we do recommend that those at higher risk for illness from novel coronavirus take steps to avoid crowded public settings as much as possible, including mass transit. If you are in one of these groups and are unable to avoid mass transit, we recommend that you avoid rush

hour times to limit close contact with others if you can, and wash your hands after riding transit.

Metro Transit is also taking extra precautions to limit the spread of disease, including daily cleanings, and is working to best support riders and transit workers. If you feel sick with flu or cold symptoms, you should avoid riding mass transit whenever possible. We also recommend not touching your face and washing your hands before and after each trip.

Should I cancel my event?

If you can feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together, please consider postponing your event.

If you cannot postpone your event, please:

- Urge anyone who is sick not to attend
- Encourage people at higher risk to not attend, such as people over 60 years old, people with underlying health conditions, or people who are pregnant
- Try to find ways to give people more physical space as much as possible – ideally 6 feet apart
- Encourage attendees to maintain good healthy habits, such as frequent hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue
- Regularly clean frequently-touched surfaces with standard cleaners

Events are still going to go on, but particularly if you are a part of a high-risk groups, you should evaluate your own risk and whether it makes sense to go.

Should I close my business or school?

We respect schools and businesses to make decisions about closures and postponement of events according to the needs of their organizations.

What do you mean by minimizing close contact?

Minimizing close contact is a way to reduce spread of infection by increasing space between people in settings where people come together.

This can include everything from increasing space between people in line at the grocery store to cancelling or discouraging people from attending events, such as sporting events, concerts, conferences, or others.

Staying six feet apart from others is the best, but if this is not possible, try to stay at arms' length away from people.

What will happen if novel coronavirus continues to spread?

Novel coronavirus is here and will continue to spread throughout the community. We are making these recommendations early in the outbreak to help slow the spread of the illness, reduce the number of people impacted, and better protect people at high risk of severe illness.

We will continue to closely monitor the spread of the disease in the community and adjust our tactics for disease control as appropriate. These steps could include requiring event cancellations and warranted closures of schools and child care centers. However, the decision to implement these requirements will not be made lightly and will only be implemented in the case of widespread illness.