



COVID cases up statewide; school data positive

By Mark Krulish

Thursday, November 5, 2020 12:20pm | [NEWS](#) [CORONAVIRUS](#) [KITSAP COUNTY](#)

COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Washington state, driven by upticks in some of the state's largest counties in Western Washington.

Department of Health data shows that through Oct. 15 the seven-day rolling average of new confirmed positive cases had jumped from 355 to 613, representing a 72 percent increase, driven by rises in Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston and Clark counties, Dr. Kathy Lofy, the state's Health Officer, said during a weekly media briefing.

The growth has been widely distributed, Lofy said, though a clearer sharp increase has taken place in Western Washington, especially among residents ages 25 to 54.

Kitsap County has seen its epidemiological curve bounce around over the

past couple of months. Through last week, Kitsap had 45.9 cases per 100,000 residents over the previous 14 days, an increase from a low of 29 per 100,000 in mid-September, but a decrease from early October.



State officials attributed an increase in informal gatherings as one of the reasons cases are on the rise. Lacy Fehrenbach, deputy Secretary of Health, recounted a recent outbreak that saw six COVID cases stem from a one gathering of family and friends.

As the state heads for November and flu season and a time in when modelers and experts predict another wave of coronavirus spikes, Fehrenbach asked folks to keep gatherings small, be outdoors whenever possible and stay home if you're sick or have been exposed to someone with COVID.

"This is a critical moment to recommit to the actions we know prevent the spread of COVID-19," Fehrenbach said.

Positive school data

As most Kitsap school districts get set to bring back their youngest students on Nov. 9 for hybrid learning — with the exception of Bainbridge Island, which postponed to January — data from 1,200 schools across the country shows 36 outbreaks in the K-12 environment — 10 happened prior to schools shutting down on-campus learning in the spring. There have been 26 reported since Sept. 1.

An outbreak is defined as two or more confirmed cases of COVID among staff or students within a 14-day period where a plausible epidemiological link can be established or other signs that transmission occurred in the school can be found.

Of the 26 outbreaks, 3 % had five or more cases, and less than 1% had 10 or more cases.

"We are seeing promising signs and hopeful signs that we can open school safely with good health and safety measures in place," Fehrenbach said, noting infection rates are particularly low among elementary school students.

Prep for vaccine

State officials are working on identifying sites, most likely hospitals, that will carry the first round of COVID-19 vaccines when they become available.



The federal government has asked that all states be ready by Nov. 15, though that is not necessarily the date when a vaccine will be ready, said Michele Roberts, the Department of Health's acting assistant secretary.

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