



Media Release

For immediate release: November 15, 2020

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Additional Safety Measures and Schools

YAKIMA, WA – While K-12 and higher education are exempt from the additional safety measures announced by the Governor’s Office, the Yakima Health District met with local superintendents earlier today to discuss steps forward. The Washington State Department of Health encouraged local health jurisdictions and schools to continue doing the good work that has been conducted thus far to optimize safety in schools. In Yakima County, Kindergarten through eighth grade will continue to open up as planned by the local school districts.

“We have seen incredible success by the schools that have conducted in-person learning thus far. Since schools have begun to return to in-person learning, there have been a total of 61 confirmed cases among students and staff that have been physically at school while infectious. Of those 61, only 2 individuals are believed to have acquired COVID-19 while at the school. We know that our local schools are following all the necessary precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the environment continues to be low-risk to our young learners.” Said Ryan Ibach, Chief Operating Officer of the Yakima Health District.

Given the increase in disease activity across the state, the Yakima Health District and local school officials do not want to jeopardize the younger grade levels from having to go back into remote learning. For this reason, all plans for in-person learning for high school students will be paused until further notice. High school students make up the largest single age group of cases among school aged individuals (42% over the last two months), and there is evidence that demonstrates increased risk of transmission from young adults with COVID-19. In addition to halting in-person learning for high school students in Yakima County, statewide youth sports will also be modified to allow only for outdoor intra-team practices per recommendations by the Governor’s office.

“To ensure we can keep a safe learning environment for our youngest learners it’s important that staff, students and families continue to follow public health safety recommendations and to actively participate in the disease investigation process. We need families to ensure that they are screening students every day before they go to school for symptoms of COVID-19, and if there are symptoms, that they are tested as quickly as possible with a simple nasal swab to determine if those symptoms are from COVID-19. We also need families to answer their phones for the case investigation interview, and for any close contacts identified to get tested as recommended so we can determine if there has been any transmission at school.”

“It is through all of us working together to quickly act upon any information of potential COVID-19 exposure that we can ensure that our kids can continue to be in schools. Families who refuse to participate in recommended testing and contact tracing are a threat to a safe learning environment. We are committed to keep schools as safe as possible, but cannot do so if we cannot identify who is sick and who is not, and any refusal to participate in case investigation *increases* risk of classroom or school closure by allowing undetected spread” Said Dr. Teresa Everson, Health Officer at Yakima Health District.

Several families have voiced concerns about testing their children and how invasive the testing process may be. At this point in time, most providers, including the community-based testing sites, are offering nasal swab testing. This type of testing is minimally invasive and has the individual swab their own nostrils if they are old enough to do so. The test itself takes less than 30 seconds. To get tested call your primary care provider and ask what type of testing procedures they have or visit one of the community-based testing sites, which typically have wait times on average, 30 minutes from start to finish. More information on testing sites can be found on the Yakima Health District’s [website](#).

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