



Yakima Health District

Media Release

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COVID-19 in Yakima County, One Month Review

Yakima, WA – On **March 11, 2020** Yakima Health District officials announced the first positive COVID-19 cases in Yakima County. One month later, Yakima County has had **535** confirmed cases locally, with **21** deaths attributed to the virus.

We're only four weeks into our local COVID-19 outbreak, but already nearly everything about our daily lives has changed, from the way we work, shop and socialize. Unfortunately, we have lost twenty-one members of our community to COVID-19 and feel a profound sense of grief for the friends and loved ones who mourn their passing. Many families are anxiously awaiting the recovery of their family members who are currently hospitalized as we all work to follow the best practices of social distancing. Here's a review of the past month.

COMMUNITY TESTING

To date, there have been at least **2,704** tests conducted in Yakima County. Over the last month, it became increasingly apparent that there were not enough COVID-19 testing kits available nationally to meet the local demand in Yakima County. For this reason, the Yakima Health District [recommended](#) that providers prioritize COVID-19 testing for healthcare workers, first responders and critical infrastructure workers.

While testing shortages have been a cause for prioritization, with recent developments we hope to see an increase in community testing availability. Earlier this week, the Yakima Health District, along with the Yakima Valley Office of Emergency Management and many other partners hosted a [Drive-Through Testing site at the Central Washington Fairgrounds](#). Over **500** individuals were tested over four days. At least **11** positive COVID-19 cases were identified through this testing site, with many results still pending. In addition, we are expecting an additional **3,500** test kits to come into our community this week.

We will continue to work to ensure we have increased testing supplies, and individuals currently concerned about COVID-19 infection symptoms can contact their healthcare provider to ask about testing. It is important for the community to remember, though, that most people who get infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate symptoms. We don't currently have medications to treat COVID-19, so whether you test positive or negative your healthcare provider's management of your symptoms will be the [same](#). However, if you do test positive, your instructions will include recommendations to prevent infecting others at home and instructions to not leave the house (isolate) for a period of time unless it is an emergency.

COMMUNITY SPREAD

To limit community spread, decisive action was taken early by government officials with in-restaurant dining closing, schools closing, and eventually all non-essential services closed. Schools have now been closed for the remainder of the 19-20 school year. Non-essential businesses remain closed through at least May 4th.

Across the nation, long-term care facilities and other congregate living settings continue to be a hot spot for the spread of COVID-19. The Yakima Health District has been working closely with our long-term care facilities to ensure we can stop the spread of disease. The first cases at long-term care facilities were confirmed on March 20, 2020, at Good Samaritan and a month later, there are 5 long-term care facilities with current COVID-19 outbreaks that have resulted in at least **168**



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cases and **18** deaths. As widespread testing occurs at these long-term care facilities, we expect these numbers to continue to rise.

Increasing concern has also been raised around our critical infrastructure workers. The Yakima Health District will be monitoring hot-spots of COVID-19 identified through the contact investigation process. We recognize that many of our community members are still working in critical infrastructure jobs and it is imperative that these staff members are provided guidance and support as they work to serve our local communities. Specific guidance has been developed by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) for businesses and workers to ensure the safety of the community while also ensuring continuity of operations.

EVERYONE MUST ACT

At this point in time, the public health recommendations are the same for *everyone*. Everyone must act as if they are a carrier of COVID-19, even if they are not experiencing any symptoms. This means staying at home except to conduct essential activities or to go to an essential workplace. When at home or at work, washing hands frequently, avoiding touching mouth, nose or eyes, ensuring surfaces are sanitized frequently, and, if possible, wearing a mask. These simple and effective actions continue to be the **best tools** we have to stop the spread in our community.

For more information on the most recent public health recommendations go to www.yakimatgether.org or www.yakimajuntos.org. These websites were designed for community members to obtain quick information to share with family members or friends.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

While we have and continue to work through immense hardships as a community, we must highlight the progress that has been made as well. Through the Yakima County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that was established upon the activation of the Unified Command Structure, we are able to work directly with many of our local government agencies, law enforcement, Yakima County Government and all of our cities. The EOC has been pivotal and has worked alongside the Yakima Health District to ensure that the community remains informed, that we can properly support our healthcare system, and that we can procure resources for the community. We have relied on our hospital partners, federally-designated community clinics, long-term care facilities and private clinicians as they have worked diligently to provide expert medical care to those in need. We express our continued commitment to social service agencies, local non-profits and business trade organizations as they navigate a difficult path to support those they serve.

TO OUR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND NEIGHBORS

"At the local level, we have seen an incredible resilience in our communities as we have all adapted to this new reality. The 'can-do' spirit of Yakima is evident in the willingness of residents to make difficult sacrifices to keep all of us safe and well." said Andre Fresco, Executive Director.

We want to thank all the businesses who have quickly adapted to this new normal and those that have been compromised in their ability to remain open. We thank Yakima County students who had in-school schedules canceled, high school seniors with graduation celebrations put on hold and educators working to plan teaching schedules virtually. We recognize the valiant efforts of our front-line heroes, from medical staff to first responders, supermarket and gas station employees, law enforcement, public transportation and utility workers. We are grateful to the religious community that embraced the difficult decision to worship at a distance through virtual church services and we grieve with the family and friends who have suffered the loss of loved ones in the season of COVID-19.



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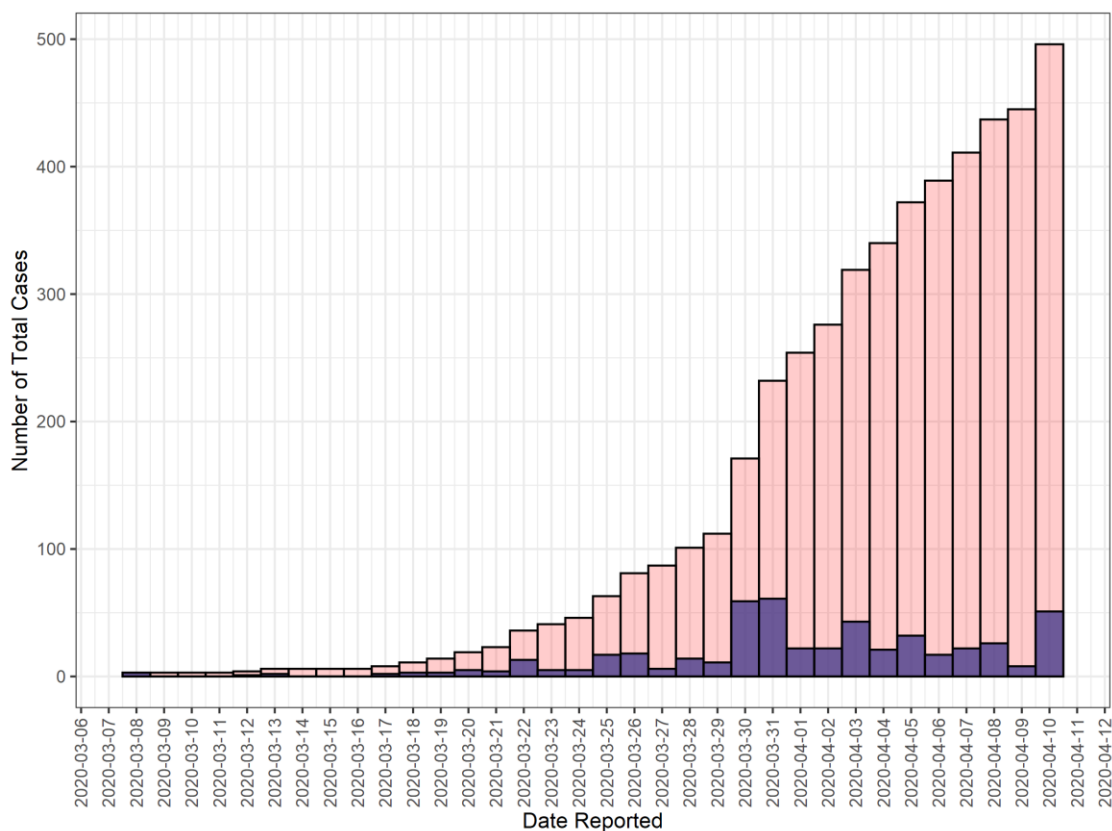
MOVING FORWARD

We want to thank each and every person who has worked tirelessly to spread COVID-19 information and guidelines far and wide, who is advocating for the safety of the community and is doing their part to slow the spread of disease in Yakima. As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the world, more has been learned, but there are many questions that we still cannot answer. However, we remain vigilant in the goal of keeping Yakima County residents safe.

“Looking at our data, we are confident that we have started to flatten the curve locally and have likely successfully blunted and delayed the peak of the wave of infections in Yakima County. We expect to peak in the next 1-2 weeks, and our healthcare system and vulnerable community members are relying on you to continue to stay at home, wear your masks, wash your hands, and support each other virtually. The last month has proven that we *can* rise to the occasion and each do our part to make sure as few people as possible are impacted by this infection. **There is a long road to community recovery ahead, but we can do it together.**” Said Dr. Teresa Everson, Health Officer at the Yakima Health District.

Visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more information on what you can do to keep yourself and your family healthy.

Total Number of Confirmed Cases by Date



Red represents the cumulative total number of cases, and blue represents the amount of new cases on that day.

Information in the table is taken from Washington State Disease Reporting System. This information is typically 24-48 hours behind local health jurisdiction data.