



Media Advisory

For immediate release: September 28, 2020

Contact: Lilian Bravo, Director of Public Health Partnerships

509.930.4787

Yakima Health District Updates Recommendation for In-Person Learning

YAKIMA, WA – On August 4, 2020 the Yakima Health District [strongly urged local school officials to implement distance learning](#) for all students except for those that were most educationally at-risk. At the time, Yakima County had almost 339 cases per 100,000 in the previous 14-day period and approximately 30 hospitalizations due to COVID-19. These numbers put Yakima County at more than 4 times the recommended threshold for any type of in-person learning, per the Department of Health recommendations.

Now, after reviewing the local Yakima Health District data, as of 9/24//20, our local case rate over the past three weeks has stabilized between 95-115 cases/100,000 population over 14 days, and hospitalization rates for COVID-19 across the county have also remained stable between 9-14 cases daily. There are several communities within Yakima County that have remained below the 75 cases/100,000/14-day benchmark recommended by the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) for in-person hybrid learning.

The Washington State Department of Health [guidelines](#) recommend distance learning until COVID-19 disease activity is at a moderate level, defined as 25-75 cases/100,000 population over 14 days. However, these same guidelines recommend consideration of other local factors such as COVID-19 test positivity, hospital and ICU capacity, stability of case counts, and the ability of schools to implement mitigation strategies. While current case counts place Yakima County in the category of higher (not highest) risk for transmission, many other factors, place Yakima County in moderate risk categories.

It is the Yakima Health District's recommendation that the community capitalizes on the collective achievements we have made in reducing and stabilizing case counts and take this opportunity to take measured steps forward towards in-person education. For this reason, on 9/25/20 YHD sent a letter to local school officials recommending they consider:

- Advancing **in-person learning** for grades **K-5 as early as October 12th** pending ongoing stable case counts and hospitalization rates. Schools must observe all safety recommendations including cohorting students, ensuring daily health screenings are completed, managing masking requirements, enforcing handwashing, providing for and enforcing social distancing requirements, ensuring proper disinfection, and consulting with YHD regarding any known or suspected COVID-19 in students or staff. *Remote learning options must be provided to those families preferring this option.*
- Advancing **hybrid learning for grades 6-8 as early as November 2nd** (minimum of 3 weeks from reopening of K-5) pending ongoing stable case counts and hospitalization rates and observing all safety recommendations above.
- Advancing **hybrid learning for grades 9-12 as early as November 23rd** (minimum of 3 weeks from reopening of grades 6-8) pending ongoing stable case counts and hospitalization rates and observing all safety recommendations above.

It is anticipated that it will only be necessary to close schools and revert to distance learning if outbreaks occur within schools themselves or should community transmission reach a rate requiring a return to previous social distancing restrictions, including distance learning. Medically fragile and high-risk individuals are still recommended to work and learn remotely when feasible, and distance learning must continue to be offered to those families judging the risks of in-person learning to outweigh the benefits.

QUOTES:

“YHD will continue to monitor COVID-19 rates between now and these proposed start dates to ensure that in-person education remains safe for our county, however COVID-19 transmission in Yakima County and our collective safety remain dependent on strict individual and community adherence to COVID-19 protocols, including use of face coverings, social distancing, isolating and testing when ill, and quarantining and testing when exposed to COVID-19. It is also important now more than ever that families keep students home when ill with *any* infection to simultaneously care for the student and avoid additional disruption to classrooms, and that employers and the community continue to support our working parents.” Dr. Teresa Everson, Health Officer, Yakima Health District

“We recognize the sacrifice that parents and care givers in our valley have made to manage work, family and educational responsibilities in these unprecedented times. We value the stewardship of our educational partners who have worked for months on multiple plans to make school available and safe for children. And we remain indebted to the greater Yakima community for their continued vigilance to make safe and informed choices that have allowed schools to re-open. It is because of your hard work that our COVID-19 numbers have reduced to a level that permits schools to resume in-person learning.” Andre Fresco, Executive Director, Yakima Health District

Additional Resources

[WA State Safe Start Risk Assessment Dashboard](#)

[WA State DOH K-12 Decision Tree](#)

[CDC indicators and thresholds for risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in schools](#)

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