

KITTITAS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH  
VIDEO UPDATE  
Tuesday, January 12, 2021

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Today's video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtNQkHj\\_vbg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtNQkHj_vbg)

KCPHD channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyQzBwJLbkLj7WueKJ5w7mQ/>

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Good morning. It's Dr. Larson talking about COVID-19. I will talk about a couple of things today.

The Kittitas County incident rate is moving down. We are seeing about 20 cases per day, as a result of people getting together over the Christmas and New Year's holidays. We crossed into the 600 range and are coming down more.

Our percent positive rate is still above 16%, so we have lots and lots of positive tests coming through.

The biggest news is that as of Monday, we became part of the South Central Region. Governor Inslee's restrictions are still in place, and we now share a region with Yakima, Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, and Columbia Counties. Together, we need to meet metrics in regard to hospitalization, COVID-19, ICU bed availability, and both incident rates and percent positive rates going down.

We did get together with the health officers and administrators from all of those health departments on Monday, and we will be setting up a weekly meeting. We want to move forward out of Phase 1 of the governor's reopening plan, the phase that we are currently in. If I we meet some metrics, we can move into Phase 2. There are no further phases currently, but I would expect a Phase 3 to eventually be released as we get through the winter.

I want to talk about testing, both in the schools and out of the schools. I have some boxes of testing kits beside me here.

First, I will talk about outside the school. If you have *any* symptom of COVID-19, or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, you should be tested. End of story. Testing can happen at Urgent Care, at some of the physicians' offices in town, or at the COVID Clinic. There is not cost at the COVID Clinic. It applies to your insurance, but not to your

deductible. There is no co-pay. The return on those tests is fewer than two days now.

I really want to talk about testing within the schools. Our K-12 schools have been open this school year. Kittitas School District started that process, and now all the K-12 schools are open in a hybrid model. To keep the schools open, especially with a lot of disease in the community, we all have to have some mitigation strategies: Maintaining the six foot social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands frequently. Those are the most important things.

Those who work in the schools have to be careful with what they are doing outside of the schools so they don't bring COVID-19 into the schools where they work. That applies to teachers, as well as the students.

How do we reduce the risk in the schools? With testing, and there are a variety of ways to do this.

The first testing strategy in place is rapid antigen testing being offered to teachers once a week. Eventually, we will offer this type of testing to students and staff twice a week. That's a lot for the school nurses, but this will allow us to capture the folks as they get to the point of being infective. With a positive test result, we can remove those folks out of the schools so they don't spread the disease to others.

That, combined with maintaining masking, social distancing, and hand washing, has kept the numbers in the schools low. We have had one episode of transmission within the school, but overall we, including the teachers, have done a great job in getting schools through the first half of the school year.

So, there will be more aggressive testing in the schools coming soon. The reason for this is not punishment, but to allow us to keep the schools open. Each school will have a different protocol, but basically we will test twice a week. We have enough test kits at the Health Department to do the rapid testing.

If a student or teacher is sick at the school, the school nurse will do a rapid test there. If that test is positive, that person gets to go home and isolate for 10 days. If the test is negative, but the person is symptomatic, they need a PCR test which is a secondary test that we have available. We will be perhaps send those test kits home so parents can test at home.

Testing is how we'll get through this.

The other issue with schools is that we'll be getting the teachers vaccinated. Most teachers are currently in Phase B2, the teachers older than 50. We're still waiting on more vaccine availability, though, which is key.

Social distancing, masking, being careful what we're doing outside of school, testing in schools, and being vaccinated when you have that option is important.

That's all for today. Take good care and we'll talk to you next week.

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