

Washington State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)

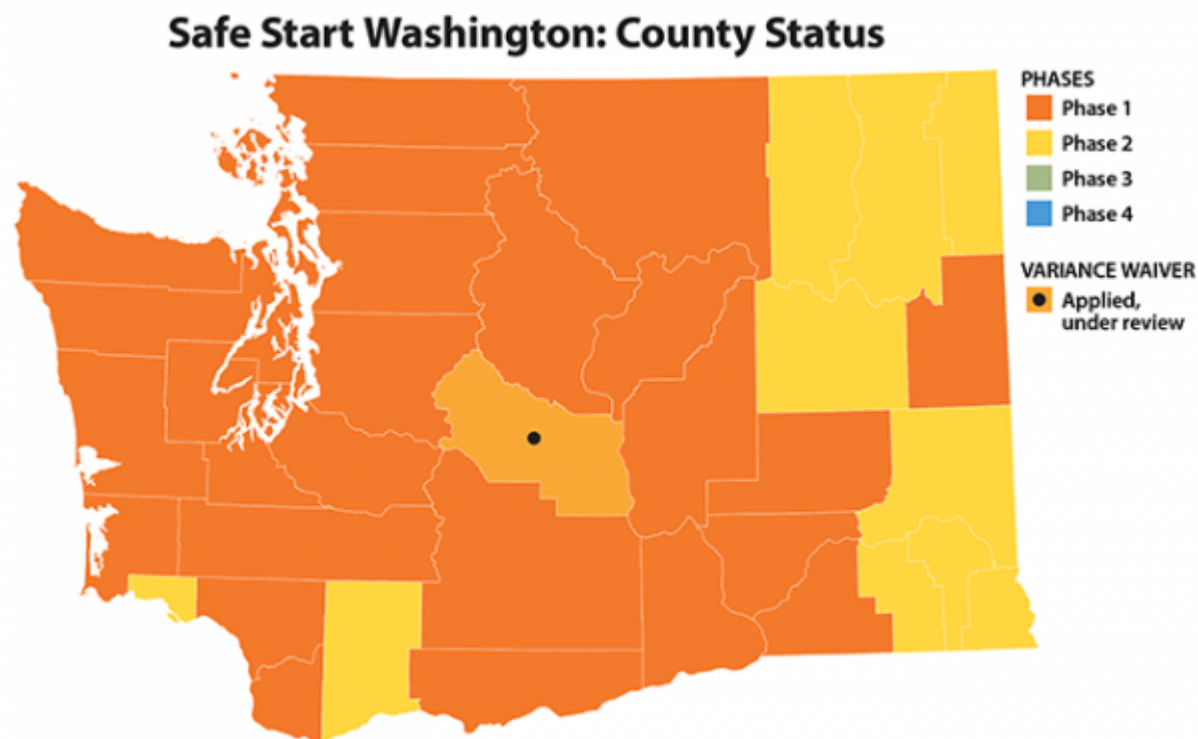
COVID-19 County Variance Application Process

FASTER REOPENING FOR SMALLER, COVID-FREE COUNTIES

Some smaller counties are experiencing very low COVID-19 activity. Every part of the state is experiencing COVID-19 differently. The governor's Safe Start approach allows counties with a population of less than 75,000 to apply to the state Department of Health with a plan to reopen additional sectors of public life a little more quickly if they meet [eligibility requirements](#). In addition, counties with less than 10 new cases per 100,000 residents over a 14-day span are also eligible to apply.

Learn more about the business, recreational and spiritual [activities allowed for each phase](#) and guidance for safe reopening. Businesses can only reopen after the governor's office provides industry-specific guidance and the business is able to comply with all health and safety requirements. A county or the state may move into a new phase before that guidance is available meaning businesses must wait before resuming operations.

CURRENT SAFE START STATUS (LAST UPDATED MAY 18, 2020)



- **Counties approved:** Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Ferry, Pend Oreille, Skamania, Stevens, Wahkiakum, and Whitman.
- **Counties that have applied and are still under review:** Kittitas
- **Eligible counties that have not applied:** Grays Harbor and Jefferson

What are the eligibility criteria for a county to apply to move to Phase 2?

- County population of less than 75,000 individuals
- No COVID-19-positive residents for the past 3 weeks

Counties with less than 75,000 people but have some COVID-19 activity can become eligible once they demonstrate:

- Adequate local hospital bed capacity
- Adequate PPE supplies to keep health care workers safe

What does the application process involve:

Counties that meet the criteria and wish to apply for a variance must:

- Submit a signed recommendation from the local public health officer to the local board of health with one of the following recommendations: not to request a variance and stay in Phase 1; to request a variance to include all of the Phase 2 modifications above; or request a subset of Phase 2 modifications.
- The local board of health, if they choose to move forward with a variance request, must vote on such a request.
- The local hospital(s) must submit a letter certifying that they have adequate bed capacity to serve their community and adequate PPE supplies to keep their workers safe.
- The county commission/council must request to move to Phase 2 (or a subset of Phase 2) of the "Safe Start" plan.

The county's application must include the following information:

- Plans to make COVID-19 testing available and accessible to everyone in the county with symptoms
- Number of tests performed per week over the past 3 weeks
- Number of people trained and ready to perform case investigations and contact tracing
- Plans to house people in isolation or quarantine who do not have a home or wish to isolate or quarantine themselves outside of their home

- Plans to provide case management services to cases and contacts in isolation and quarantine
- Plans to rapidly respond to outbreaks in congregate settings

What does the approval process look like? Can an approval be revoked if circumstances change in the county?

The Department of Health will review all variance requests based on the criteria outlined in the [application process](#). County variance applications will be approved or denied by the Secretary of Health. The secretary can either approve the plan as submitted, approve with modifications, or deny the application. A variance may be revoked if circumstances change within the jurisdiction, such as a significant outbreak, no or minimal access to COVID-19 testing, no surge capacity in area hospitals, inadequate PPE supplies, or inadequate case and contact investigations.

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