WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department

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MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Whatcom County not eligible to apply for Phase 3 this week

BELLINGHAM, WA – Whatcom County does not meet the eligibility requirements to move to Phase 3 of Washington State's Safe Start reopening plan and will not be applying to move into Phase 3 later this week. Friday, June 26, marks three weeks since Whatcom County moved into Phase 2 of the reopening plan; however, with a 14-day average case count that is over the target, the county does not meet the State's criteria to safely move into the next phase.

Case Counts
In order to be eligible for Phase 3, Washington counties must maintain a new case count of no more than 25 cases per 100,000 residents over the previous two weeks. As of data from June 21, Whatcom County's 14-day average is 28.9 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents. This number includes more than 50 newly confirmed cases over the past four days*.

To bring our case counts back down to meet the metric, Whatcom County would need no new cases until July 2.

Reducing the case count is possible, and requires individuals and employers to follow health guidance in order for our community to successfully move to the next phase.

"It's disappointing that our county is not in a position to be able to apply for Phase 3 this week," said Erika Lautenbach, director of the Whatcom County Health Department.

"Since we moved into Phase 2 and started to reopen the economy, we have seen an increase in our confirmed cases, which has led to more spread throughout the county. We have the tools to bring our numbers back down though - like wearing masks, maintaining physical distance and staying home when we're sick," said Lautenbach. "I am confident that we can significantly lower our numbers, and help our businesses reopen, if we all make decisions that will keep ourselves and each other safe and healthy."

Anyone who has even mild COVID-19 symptoms should contact their healthcare provider to ask about getting tested.

Other Phase Three Criteria
Whatcom County is meeting the requirements for healthcare system readiness. The number of licensed beds occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as other patients is well under the thresholds for those two requirements.

Whatcom County is very close to meeting Phase Three requirements on testing capacity: the ability to perform 50 tests for each positive test over the past week, or a 2% positivity rate. The current rate is an average 47.7 tests for each new case, or a 2.1% positive testing rate over the past week. Because the county is close to meeting testing criteria - off by only .1% - this alone would not prevent moving into Phase 3.

Information on Whatcom County's case numbers can be found on Whatcom County Health Department's COVID-19 Data Dashboard, and key metrics can be found on the Washington State COVID-19 Risk Assessment Dashboard. Both dashboards are updated daily with the latest information.

What each person does, collectively and as a community, will impact what happens in Whatcom County two weeks from now. Whatcom County has shown its resilience and dedication by moving from Phase 1 to Phase 2. Each person must continue to choose those things that will keep ourselves and the community safe, in order to move through the phases, and fully reopen the economy.

Note: According to a statement on June 22 from the Washington State Department of Health, "due to an issue that stalled data reporting starting Saturday night through Monday morning, both the DOH and the risk assessment dashboards have lower total tests and case counts today. The problem has been resolved, but cases and tests will be lower as the department works to account for the backlog. DOH will share an update once this is resolved." Whatcom County Health Department has received data on tests ordered by the Health Department and from a limited number of health care providers. WCHD is reporting here based on the partial data we have received directly.

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