



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Whatcom County Health Department Investigates COVID-19 Spread From Large Private Gatherings**

**BELLINGHAM, WA** – The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) is investigating a series of outbreaks of COVID-19 related to large private and recreational social gatherings held in Whatcom County in late May. These events took place during the Stay Home, Stay Healthy Order and Phase 1 of Washington's "[Safe Start](#)" plan, which had no allowances for gatherings. Attendees of these gatherings in public places and parties hosted at private residences have since been diagnosed with COVID-19. Preliminary investigations have determined close contacts of party-goers have also become infected with the illness. Disease investigations are ongoing.

These events emphasize the increased risk of infection presented by large gatherings, regardless of location. Some individuals with COVID-19 will not have symptoms, not know they are infected, and thus can transmit the virus to others without knowing. People who have attended large gatherings and were unable to maintain 6 foot distance around others who were not using face coverings, especially if around people shouting at close distance, should monitor symptoms for 14 days, minimize contact with others, and consider getting tested a week after the event. If they develop even minor symptoms of COVID-19, they should isolate from others and get tested.

This investigation underscores the importance of following current guidelines for Phase 2. This includes limiting gatherings to 5 people or fewer from outside of your household per week, maintaining physical distance, and wearing a face covering when in public.

There is a risk of exposure to COVID-19 throughout our community. Taking the necessary precautions is imperative to slowing the spread of COVID-19. "COVID-19 is not over yet," Whatcom County Health Officer Dr. Greg Stern said. "It's still up to us to follow the precautions and guidelines so we can prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

Larger gatherings provide the opportunity for the virus to spread more easily, especially if physical distancing is not observed and face coverings are not utilized. Individuals who contracted the virus while in attendance at the parties then carry the virus with them to their place of residence, work, or other gatherings, furthering the spread of COVID-19 in the community. This is called secondary transmission.

An outbreak is two or more cases of COVID-19 among individuals who were exposed to the virus from the same source, such as at a workplace or informal gathering.

The WCHD notified the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) of these events, as required. It is not yet known if these outbreaks will impact the county's ability to remain in Phase 2.



WCHD staff continues to learn more about the outbreaks, and their potential impact on Phase 2 status, as additional investigations and tests are conducted.

Learn more about how the Whatcom County Health Department handles outbreaks of COVID-19 in our [recent newsflash](#).

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