

MEMO

To: Kitsap Public Health Board

From: Susan Turner MD, MPH, MS, Health Officer
Keith Grellner, Administrator

Date: May 27, 2020

Re: Resolution 2020-04, Approving the Recommendation of Kitsap Public Health Officer to Request a State Variance to Move Kitsap County from Phase 1 to All Phase 2 Modifications of the Governor’s “Safe Start” Plan Kitsap County

Kitsap County has been experiencing the consequences of the worldwide COVID-19 Pandemic since early February 2020. Kitsap’s first case was reported to Kitsap Public Health District (KPHD) on 3/8/2020. As of 5/25/2020, 162 lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported to KPHD, with a peak of reported cases occurring over the period from 3/28 through 4/5/2020. The Kitsap community widely has experienced serious hardship and demonstrated remarkable resilience and commitment to preventing COVID-19 transmission, as evidenced by low COVID incidence rates in Kitsap County. KPHD acknowledges and applauds the strength, dedication, and will of most of our community to follow public health guidance to get us through the COVID-19 epidemic.

On May 19, 2020, Governor Inslee [announced](#) a new, expanded opportunity for certain smaller counties with less than 10 new COVID-19 cases / 100,000 population over the past 14 day span (or <0.71 new cases/100,000/day) to apply for a variance to move from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of his “Safe Start” plan. Under the new criteria, Kitsap County is now an eligible county to apply for a variance. Unlike the initial variance offering in early May 2020, the second variance opportunity does not have a population limit of 75,000 or fewer residents (Kitsap has a population of 270,100 residents).

In accordance with the Governor’s most recent variance opportunity announcement and the published [variance instructions](#) from the state Department of Health, please find attached for your review and consideration:

1. A letter of recommendation from the Health Officer to move Kitsap County from Phase 1 to the full Phase 2 modifications: and
2. A completed variance application that demonstrates that Kitsap County is ready to move to Phase 2 of the Governor’s “Safe Start” plan and proposed Resolution 2020-04.

While we understand that many residents are in a dire economic state due to the Governor’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order, and that Kitsap is now eligible to move to Phase 2 because of the many sacrifices residents have made, the move to Phase 2 is not without challenges.

Movement to Phase 2 of the Governor’s Safe Start plan will increase the personal responsibility of all residents to comply with public health guidelines and recommendations, and may place additional Kitsap County residents at risk of exposure to COVID-19, including the risk of severe illness and even death from the disease, especially those at most risk of such complications. Thus, the decision to move to that phase requires cross-community communication and collaboration to address those risks.

A summary of concerns and risks follows:

- Revived spread of COVID in Kitsap County is likely. Resulting cases will cause individual and family hardship and loss, and will strain the public health and healthcare systems.
- Along with the revived spread of COVID, infrastructure and essential workers are at elevated risk of COVID infection (especially given the shortage of personal protective equipment described below), which may interfere with the operation of healthcare, government, law enforcement and community services. Planning for staff shortages by these entities is critical.
- Harrison Hospital has only just re-opened “elective” surgeries, which are often required to address ongoing pain, disability, and suffering. It is possible access to such important surgeries may be suspended again if the level of COVID-19 resurgence overtaxes the healthcare system or the personal protective equipment (PPE) supply chain.
- At this time, the testing supply chain remains challenged, and while the county is presently in sufficient shape, there remains a nagging risk statewide and nationally to periodic shortages of testing supplies and the personal protective equipment necessary to protect healthcare workers:
 - This shortage makes it possible that with a surge of COVID-19 infections, there may not be enough testing supplies and PPE to test and thus identify all COVID-19 cases at all times.
 - New messaging encouraging even mildly ill individuals to seek COVID-19 testing will likely increase demand for testing, thus placing more of a strain on testing and PPE supplies; the flipside of more testing is that the results will provide improved surveillance information and case finding which is strongly desired by the public health system.
 - We have recently learned of a planned state directive to test all long-term care facility and memory center personnel and residents for COVID-19 in the near

future, and on a biweekly basis following initial testing. Additionally, there is also a state plan to test all assisted living facility and adult care home personnel and residents by June 30, 2020. This will stress testing supply availability to diagnose COVID-19 in all those who are symptomatic.

- Kitsap County Department of Emergency Management is working to attain adequate testing supplies to support the county for the proposed residential facility testing.

- Similarly, the PPE supply chain remains sporadic and healthcare workers are currently being asked to conserve and limit utilization of PPE as part of crisis standards of care. With additional COVID cases, the supply may be further challenged. This situation is not unique to Kitsap County, but is a statewide, and even nationwide issue. The Kitsap Department of Emergency Management is working to attain a secure supply of PPE for healthcare workers, critical workers, and to assist businesses that will open under Phase 2 implementation.
- A large surge of COVID-19 cases will require implementation of KPHD’s surge plan for case and contact investigation, in which environmental health employees may be pulled away from their “normal” work on a temporary basis while KPHD requests DOH surge assistance. This type of event may result in temporary service processing delays for some Environmental Health work (e.g., sewage permits, food inspections, garbage complaint enforcement, etc.). KPHD also has a surge plan to augment normal staffing with volunteer workers from the EOC to provide assistance in contact monitoring.
- Under Phase 2 of the Safe Start Plan, significant nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPI) for disease control remain in place and are essential to prevent spread of COVID-19. Kitsap residents and businesses will not be simply returning to the “old ways of doing business”. Significant behavior change is required of the public and of businesses, as well as significant physical changes at businesses, to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Because of business and activity closures due to the “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order to this point, the majority of the public and of businesses are not yet experienced in implementing these significant safeguards in those settings. More guidance and communication are needed, and the EOC has stepped up to help in that area. We will also need each of your jurisdictions to help with this messaging.
- There may be many public complaints about violations of Phase 2 limitations, as there have been during Phase 1. There is no clear authority for local enforcement under the Governor’s orders or a waiver. Non-compliance with NPI directives and guidelines place our entire community at risk for an outbreak. As a community, we must find a way to encourage better compliance with NPI directives.

- Long-term care facilities and congregate living situations have been identified by state and national authorities as high-risk situations for COVID-19 outbreaks. KPHD and the EOC have developed an outbreak response plan for congregate living facilities, including a task force and supplies staged and ready if requested. However, our community will have to remain diligent to help keep these vulnerable populations safe by using NPI directives to keep COVID-19 out of these settings.
- Travel between Kitsap and other counties, states, and nations will present an ongoing risk. Across Washington, there are increasing public expressions of frustration and eagerness to move to a more normal pattern of living. If Kitsap County does submit a variance application to move to Phase 2 of the Safe Start plan, and it is granted, residents of the counties adjacent to Kitsap are likely to travel to Kitsap to patronize open businesses. Those counties to Kitsap's east are currently experiencing significant community transmission of COVID-19, and travel of their residents to Kitsap will put Kitsap residents at risk of disease transmission. This may be especially true in gateway areas of the county such as Kingston, Bainbridge, Poulsbo, Bremerton, Silverdale, and Port Orchard. The epidemiology of Kitsap's latest eight of ten (80%) cases of COVID-19 demonstrate the role of travel to Kitsap from counties with disease transmission, as eight of the cases worked or travelled in areas of high transmission and brought the virus back to Kitsap. Travel is going to continue to present a significant risk to Kitsap residents.

The leadership and collaboration of all jurisdictions in Kitsap County, along with the Kitsap County Emergency Operations and its Unified Command, as well as the committed actions taken by most Kitsap County residents and businesses has resulted in near containment of COVID-19 in Kitsap County at this time. Definitive actions to address the concerns above will increase Kitsap's likelihood of success in limiting disease spread in Kitsap County in the future.

Provisionally, absent a long term care facility outbreak occurring at the time of application, Kitsap Public Health District and the Health Officer recommend Kitsap Public Health Board approval of a variance request to implement all Phase 2 modifications of the "Safe Start" plan.

If approved by the Health Board, the variance application will be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration. If approved by the County Commissioners, then the Health District Administrator is authorized to submit the entire variance application package (i.e., Health Officer letter of recommendation; Health Board approval; County Commissioner approval, variance application form signed by Health District Administrator, and the variance application supporting documentation) to the Washington State Secretary of Health for a final consideration.

Recommended Action

The Board may wish to consider making and acting on the following motion:

Move to approve Resolution 2020-04, Approving the Recommendation of Kitsap Public Health Officer to Request a State Variance to Move Kitsap County from Phase 1 to All Phase 2 Modifications of the Governor’s “Safe Start” Plan Kitsap County.