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Phase 2 Variance for Snohomish County to be Submitted Monday

Board of Health and County Council unanimously agree to proceed with variance proposal

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., May 29, 2020 – In a series of back-to-back special meetings, the Board of Health and Snohomish County Council voted to approve resolutions in support of a Phase 2 variance application. The [preliminary package is available online](#).

“I’d like to express deep gratitude to the staff and county leaders who have spent long hours preparing the materials needed for this thoughtful and comprehensive proposal,” said Stephanie Wright, Chair of the Board of Health and Vice Chair of the County Council. “I am also most appreciative to the mayors, hospitals and other partners who jumped in quickly to provide their letters of support to include in this package.”

Given updated criteria released today by Governor Inslee and the Washington State Department of Health, slight modifications will be made over the weekend and a final package will be submitted on Monday.

“COVID-19 has had varying impacts on different parts of our state, and we realize that county borders don’t prevent its spread,” said Executive Dave Somers. “I want to thank Governor Inslee for working in collaboration with us on how larger counties can safely begin to reopen. I look forward to submitting our request and continuing to focus our efforts on the health and wellbeing of our residents and businesses.”

One significant change in Snohomish County’s favor is increasing the incidence of case counts from 10 to 25 new cases per 100,000 in a 14-day period. The Snohomish Health District calculates its rates based on CDC weeks, which are Sunday through Saturday. It is anticipated that a recent downward trend in new cases this week will reflect an incidence rate well within the new threshold for Phase 2.

“Upon our initial review, the revised benchmarks would seem to further indicate that Snohomish County is ready to move forward to the next phase,” said Dr. Chris Spitters, health officer for the Snohomish Health District. “We look forward to reviewing Secretary Wiesman’s revised guidance further and for

requesting a variance as soon as it becomes available to us and then updating and submitting our updated application on Monday.”

The community is reminded that until approved by the Secretary of Health, Snohomish County remains in Phase 1. Residents and businesses should continue following principals laid out in the Stay Home, Stay Healthy orders while beginning to familiarize themselves with what moving to Phase 2 will look like.

“I am proud of this bipartisan effort to move Snohomish County to Phase II and safely reopen our businesses,” said Nate Nehring, Chair of the County Council. “It is a blessing to be a part of a team of local leaders who recognize the difficult sacrifices which have been made by our local businesses and workers and the need to safely get them back to work as soon as possible.”

In Phase 2, general guidelines include:

- Gatherings with no more than 5 people from outside your household per week. This includes outdoor recreation like camping, hiking or beach trips.
- High-risk populations – such as people older than 60, those with underlying health conditions, or pregnant women – should continue to stay home aside from essential business and errands.
- Non-essential travel will be limited to activities that are approved to reopen under Phase 2, and those will come with health and safety guidance to follow. For example, restaurants could reopen at limited on-site capacity, with appropriate social distancing, no more than five customers per table, and no bar-area seating.
- For people who can continue to work remotely, teleworking is strongly encouraged.

Allowing more businesses and activities to reopen does not mean that it will be businesses as usual. There are guidelines that employers will need to follow through all of the phases. A brief overview is below, but more is [outlined in the Safe Start Plan](#).

- Limit close interactions with customers. Arrange for six-foot physical distance between employees and patrons and use other measures, such as barriers to block sneezes and coughs, if distancing isn’t realistic for specific tasks.
- Ensure sanitation and hand hygiene are available to all workers and visitors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect the workspace, especially high-touch surfaces.
- Follow Labor and Industries (L&I) and industry-specific guidance regarding personal protective equipment or cloth face covers for workers.
- Encourage clients and customers to wear cloth face covers.
- Make a plan for addressing illness, including requiring ill employees to stay home and deep cleaning if an employee tests positive for COVID-19.
- Provide information to employees about COVID-19 and illness prevention. This could include signs or posters with information.
- Follow any additional guidance that is specific to your industry, as provided by local, state or federal public health professionals.

Businesses must wait until they have industry-specific health and safety guidance before reopening within the proper phase. Guidance for all businesses may not be available at the same time. For example, Phase 2 guidance for construction was issued on May 15 while guidance for real estate was issued on May 19. The governor's office [maintains a list of guidance for industries](#).

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