

## **TRANSCRIPT: Snohomish County response to COVID-19, April 7, 2020, press briefing**

**Dr. Chris Spitters:** Today marks the 78th day since we had the first coronavirus case in the nation. Here in Snohomish County, our residents, businesses and communities have been impacted by COVID-19 from the very beginning and I recognize the hardships that many are experiencing for our collective good.

It's true that updated models and our case counts and hospital capacity suggest that things are improving and that the social distancing measures are having an impact on the course of the pandemic. I know Admiral Bono and the Department of Health will be holding a tele-briefing later this afternoon so I encourage you to tune into that as well.

As of this morning we have 1,706 reported cases of COVID-19 cumulatively here in Snohomish County, with 58 deaths to date. Last week we had several days of 100+ new cases being reported, then toward the end of the week and over the weekend, down to about 60 day. And in the last two days of reporting were 40 and 20. That's cause for cautious optimism. But we have to keep the big picture in mind, which again is somewhat reassuring but we do need to remain steadfast in our concerted efforts to slow the spread of the virus. The peak in reports appears to have occurred one to two weeks ago and the peak in the onset of illness among those cases reported, which you would imagine is prior to the peak in reporting because it takes a few days for people to get sick and get tested, that peak looks like it was 2 to 3 weeks ago and there appears to have been a sustained decline since mid-to-late March in the number of cases whose onset is recorded, so that's good news.

The hospitals aren't really declining but they're the remaining steady. The total number of beds going to COVID patients is up in the 90s and appears stable. So the hospital resources are stretched, but not fractured at this point, so all this is cause for cautious optimism. But our containment efforts here in the public health sector and social distancing communitywide remains paramount in maintaining the advantage that we have. We cannot risk jeopardizing the good work done and sacrifices made up to this point. I sort of view it like having a 10 point lead in the third quarter, you know, things are looking good, but we can't let up. It's just too soon to do so.

As we heard with the announcement of school closures remaining through the end of the school year, we should prepare ourselves for the social distancing requirements to continue in some form through much of the spring months. Executive Somers is unable to join us this morning, but I know that the County leaders are working hard to make information hubs and resources available to the growing number of people in our county who need them. As we look ahead to Passover, Easter, Mother's Day and other holidays or events, we need to find new ways of celebrating together while staying physically apart. Toward that end, we will be publishing a blog later this week with guidelines and suggestions for our faith-based partners, community organizations and residents around having social togetherness but physical separation as these holidays and special events come forth.

We also realize that the good weather forecast this weekend will certainly bring a desire to get outside and that's a healthy and good thing to do. We just urge you to do so responsibly and maintain that physical separation from others who are in your company and as well as those who are not. Try to stay close to home nonetheless, maintain 6 foot plus distancing between yourself and others, consider wearing a face covering and wash her hands as soon as you get back inside. Use hand hygiene. If you have gel when you get back in the car, that sort of thing. And if you if you do decide to go somewhere you see a place where a lot of cars are parked, I really encourage you to either turn around and go home or find another place, just really want to discourage any crowding that could cause a resurgence and undermine the progress that we've made.

Now speaking about cloth face coverings, over the past few days CDC issued new recommendations for use of cloth face covers to be worn by the general public. Previous guidance was that only people who are ill should use face covers. However, recent findings from research and studies of transmission indicate that people can become, there can be asymptomatic shedding. Some COVID-19 infections carry no symptoms and individuals can shed virus in their respiratory secretions and many individuals, it appears, who do develop symptoms with COVID-19 can also spread for up to two days prior to recognizing that they are ill, prior to getting that fever, starting to cough or have a sore throat. So we think it's a good idea if you're going out, especially in going places where you anticipate that you can't maintain that 6 feet of distance, to use a cloth face covering. This includes essential trips like going to the grocery store, pharmacy, food bank, medical appointments, things like that and it's important to remember that wearing a cloth facemask is not a replacement for the other social distancing or hygiene measures that we've been repeatedly giving out and I'll mention them again in just a moment. So continue staying home and away from others unless you're going out for essential work or errands, follow the stay home stay healthy proclamation of the governor, and remember that that these cloth face coverings are really not about us the wearer. Their efficacy in preventing acquisition of infection from others appears limited, if any. It's really about protecting others. If I have a cloth facemask on and then I cough or sneeze, that that cloth material stops me from generating a cloud of fine droplets that can hang in the air and it catches all those big droplets that could go on and land on the surface or land on someone else and spread it. So these cloth facemask or about protecting others more than they are about protecting ourselves, and again it is just one method to slow the spread of the disease and it's really supplemental to the these other things that we continue to recommend that you practice frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing, daily cleaning and sanitizing of high touch services, doorknobs, countertops, bathroom and kitchen fixtures, keyboards, desktops, anything that's shared in the workplace. You know the front of the microwave oven, light switches. You can come up with the list in your own home and workplace, but we should be making sure those are clean and sanitized every day. Avoid touching your face, as difficult as that may be, especially with unwashed hands. Stay home except for necessities, as I mentioned above, and particularly if you are ill.

And then last but not least, again just maintain that 6 foot separation from others as much as possible and if you're going somewhere where you can't do so, use that cloth face covering. We have a blog is coming out about cloth face coverings. It will show you links to guidelines and instructions for making your own from cloth or T-shirts at home. Again, I urge you not to use products that are intended or could be used by healthcare providers. We really need to prioritize the use of that limited personal protective equipment, medical grade surgical mask, facemasks, N-95. Please do not use those for this purpose. Those need to be reserved for our medical providers, first responders, long-term care facilities and others whose lifesaving work requires them to be in close contact with patients.

Last I just want to say a word or two about testing capacity in the community. Certainly, you know, more is better. Less is worse. And so we're trying to do as much as we can all the private healthcare sector all the clinics, hospitals, the networks have done a great job and really lead the way in making testing available. We have one testing site that supplements that and as of yesterday we've tested about 1700 individuals through that test site, just under 200 a day over the past two weeks.. Of those 1,700 results, over 1,300 are back and about 60 were positive, so just about 5%. We are continuing to work on transition planning for that side as federal support for it is withdrawn effective Friday, so look for more information on that later next week. And with that, I'd like to turn it over to Snohomish County's director of emergency management, Jason Berman. Jason, take away.

**Jason Biermann:** Thanks Dr. Spitters. Good morning everyone. Again, this is Jason Biermann, director of emergency management for Snohomish County. Thanks for allowing you to have some time to spend with you. And I want to reiterate a couple of things right away that Dr. Spitters said that I think are really important. My department is charged with preparing our county for all types of disasters, from earthquakes and volcanoes to landslides to pandemics. We do that in partnership with a lot of folks, including obviously the Snohomish health district, the Sheriff's office, human services and many other agencies.

But the real key is something the Dr. Spitters hit on that I think if I can share anything that's going to be really helpful and powerful, it's that I often say emergency management is the ultimate team sport. And our team in Snohomish County is every resident, so all the measures he mentioned that every resident needs to take, those really form the foundation of everything that we do. In our office we're doing a lot of planning right now in support of the health district, and in response to what's the emerging COVID issues are around both the county and obviously in partnership with the state and other agencies.

Our emergency coordination center activated on March 1 in support of Snohomish health district and we generally have around 30 to 40 folks here each day who are working on a number of contingency plans around things like how we help our medical partners are healthcare partners surge their capacity to meet the need, around things like how do we help the community address the impacts from long-term school closures

and now we know based on the governor's announcement and the superintendent's announcement yesterday that the schools will be closed for the remainder of the year, so we been working closely with the number of partners on that. We're also working really closely, and Dr. Spitters mentioned this, around the issue of personal protective equipment. This is a real need that's felt in our community and communities around the United States right now. We been working diligently with our healthcare partners, with the health district, with our EMS providers and others to identify what their needs are and to address them as quickly as efficiently as we can. But he said something again that's really critical. With the guidance that's coming out about wearing face coverings, it's really important folks understand that medical grade personal protective equipment is in really short supply and anything that you can do to help ensure that's available to the folks who are on the front lines providing healthcare and EMS services to our residents, we really have to work hard to make sure that equipment is there and available for them. One of the things that we've done to help address that need, in addition to working closely with these partners and with the state, is we set up in our county some donation sites and I want to highlight how great our community has been, just some of the things that we've taken in relatively short order. Just a couple of days a week for the last two weeks, over 1,500 pairs of eye protection, several thousand sets of gloves, 7,500 sets of goggles, over 2,500 N-95 masks, and over 2,000 surgical masks. Those are things that the community is contributing to this effort. And again I go back to our community is everyone. Our team is everyone. So those things are really, really helpful as we try and get things both from the federal government, from the state, from private vendors and then of course these donations help quite a bit. We are also working like I mentioned really closely with vendors both local and nationwide. We have folks on average working, well working every day of the week on average 12 to 14 hours a day identifying sources for personal protective equipment so that we have those things available to these providers.

This is going to go on as the doctor mentioned for quite a long time. He mentioned that 10 point lead in the third quarter and the optimism is as he mentioned cautious optimism. We have said from the outset that this is going to be a marathon not a sprint, and all marathons have hills both uphill and downhill, so we are going to experience some of those things going forward. I just want to say from our shop, we do have a number of folks working really diligently to address these and a lot of other issues, but again what the community can do is incredibly helpful and the things that you're doing to prepare for this, for other disasters, goes a long way toward relieving some of the extra stress that we put our systems, you know, in this case the healthcare system in particular. So that's some of the items that we're doing here and I will turn it over if there are any questions.

**Dr. Chris Spitters:** I see a question saying – am I audible - I had a question for you Jason but I'll table that for now. Maybe you can see it. But in the meantime, I see can I address the question about deaths and I'm trying to find the question about deaths and maybe I'm missing it, but could you. Oh, why the spike in deaths yesterday? I think we had maybe half a dozen reported, but that's by date of report, not by date of death, so that's usually a counting issue, especially on Mondays. We just get in everything that

happened over the weekend. I'm not aware of any events or setting that was a precipitous setback in terms of overall transmission or morbidity, much less mortality. So I think that that's just a little bit of random variation plus the tendency for Mondays to generate higher numbers of reports of things like that.

The last projection that I heard was that cases would peak in mid-April. Is that still the expectation?

Well it's going to vary across this thing nationally and within the state is a multifocal phenomenon, so having been the, having the misfortune to be the first affected community we're likely to be, if all goes well, one of the first communities to emerge at the other end. That is correct. You know the local manifestation of the pandemic I think was sort of anticipated to peak around, I think the hospital surge was estimated to peak around late April-early May and the morbidity, you know the number of actual cases occurring being reported, in early to mid-May or early to mid-April, excuse me. We're maybe a week or two ahead of that model. But I think that model is expressed in the way you describe it is the one that's expressed for the statewide model and I think we're just out in front of that a little bit so there is that. If you if you Google, if you want to keep track of those models, you can Google COVID-19 IHME which is the Institute at the University of Washington that's put together those models and you can you can take a look at those.

Jason, I did have a question if I can say that. If I'm an individual or manufacturer business and I've either got some PP on a shelf back in my safety room or warehouse or I have a machine that's capable of producing some PPE or I have a 3D printer and maybe I can do something, what is the venue for me to communicate about what the needs are, or if I have something in hand to get that in the common space for the public good.

**Jason Biermann:** Thanks for the question Dr. Spitters. So if someone or a business has PPE on hand that they want to donate, the donation location is at Willis Tucker Park and we've been doing that on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. If it's a business with a 3D printer that wants to help, we've actually had a number of businesses that reached out and we're trying to network them together. They can contact us at [dem@snoco.org](mailto:dem@snoco.org) and we will get them connected to the person here in our emergency coordination center who is was coordinating that effort with the local businesses in the areas that have 3D printers that are starting to do some that work for us.

**Dr. Spitters:** Well thanks again everyone for joining us today. We look forward to talking to you later in the week and be strong, hang in there with the social distancing and there is light at the end of the tunnel. And wash those hands