

## **TRANSCRIPT: Snohomish County Response to COVID-19, June 2, 2020, Briefing**

**Executive Dave Somers:** Good morning. I just really want to start by expressing my horror and anger at what happened in Minneapolis last week, as we all are, to George Floyd, the murder of George Floyd. This really has to stop. It happens all too often and to people of color especially, and I just share the anger and anguish that many people are feeling this week. And I also want to support peaceful protest. It's part of our history. It's part of our culture. And it's part of what makes being an American a great thing, our ability to peacefully protest and work for change. It's right back to the Boston Tea Party and beyond, the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Long history. And so I support those peaceful protests. At the same time, we have elements of our society that want to create chaos and want to divide us further and take advantage of this horrible situation, and they're doing that. And so I condemn in the strongest possible words those that are looting and causing destruction and really disrespecting the memory of George Floyd. And if his brother can ask for peace, we can all ask for peace and I just ask all our citizens to work toward that end. Really express your displeasure with what happened to George, but also do so peacefully and make sure that those around you are doing that also.

So, in the midst of all this, yesterday we were able to submit our application to the State Department of Health to move into phase two of the safe start program. Over the weekend on Sunday we got new guidance in terms of what that application needed to contain and what it needed to look like, as well as new numbers. And the Department of, the Health District and our staff at the Department of emergency management had been working on an application for some time. So they really scrambled over the weekend and through the day yesterday to get that package together and in order and it was submitted at the end of the day yesterday to the state. So we're very hopeful that we will hear back in very short order, in the next day or two. And if there's any further information the state requires, we will provide that and work with them. So we have a very strong package, we tick all the boxes that the state has asked for, our numbers are good. I'm sure Dr. Spitters will speak to that, but we are well below the new standard of 25 new cases per day over a two week period. I think we're at about 18.4 or we were yesterday, 18.4 cases, so we meet that standard. It's the standard that is being used in California and elsewhere.

And there's no bright lines in the science of some of these things. They're safety factors and we really appreciate the governor's efforts to get us to this point. I think Washington State did a really good job of avoiding the crisis and the worst of it, but a lot of people are hurting economically and we know that we want to get started up again. So as we do that we really are encouraging and emphasizing that our residents need to continue to practice safety measures, distancing, stay at home as much as you can, avoid crowds, wear face coverings when in public and crowded areas. Really take care of yourselves and in particular vulnerable populations that need to be extra careful. So that caution, those cautionary measures do not go away in Phase 2. What happens in phase two is we get some businesses back up and running and we start down this path.

Now we do know that there's a minimum three week period as we get into phase two before we could possibly go to Phase three and open up even more. But that's really to make sure that as we get into phase two that we're not seeing a relapse or rebound of the virus in our community. So we're moving forward, very excited about it. Again, I hope in the next day or two to hear from the state and get the green light to go into phase two. So, let's do this and just thank again

everybody, the residents for the just great cooperation positive attitude they've had and we'll move forward together. So I'll turn it over to Dr. Spitters now.

**Dr. Chris Spitters:** Thank you, Executive Somers, and good morning everyone. So I, I also want to express my thanks to the executive, the Department of emergency management, and all of our staff here at the health district who really have worked tirelessly over the last week and then really put in a final push over the last several days to get the application across the line and delivered to executive Somers and on to the Department of Health. So we eagerly await feedback on that and feel very confident about the package we submitted. Toward that end, I'll just review briefly the key elements that indicate our readiness to proceed to phase two. As executive Somers mentioned, the case rate of 18 per 100,000 over a two week period eclipses the metric of 25 set forth by the state in the updated guidance.

We have already gotten a few questions about how that differs from the rate posted on our website, which is up around 25-26 per hundred thousand for that period. And it relates to the specific way that the Secretary of Health requested that we calculate that rate that's in the application. It's a, it's a specific time period of May 12 through May 26th and it includes only laboratory confirmed cases, so presumptive cases not included there, just laboratory confirmed. So when you when you shift the date a little bit and you and you pull out the presumed but not laboratory confirmed cases, you get a slightly lower number. Either way, both within an order of magnitude, both point at the same thing, which is that we've been in a continued decline of cases now for 11 weeks and think that we are well positioned in that respect to carry forward suppression efforts.

Our hospital capacity remains ready to handle a surge of COVID patients and is able to provide all the routine care to the people in Snohomish County, so that's a key element. So that's two of the five. The others are the testing capacity, which at our current rate we're just short of the target of 50 cases per, per, or excuse me, 50 tests per positive case over the last week or so. So if you look at our numbers we has roughly 80 to 90 cases over the last week, if you multiply that times 50 you get 4,000, 4,500, we did about 2,500 tests in the county last week. So that, the number of tests being done, is a bit short of the mark. The testing capacity based upon our survey of all the key healthcare providers and systems in the county shows a testing capacity of 5,000 to 6,000 tests per week. So, some of this is demand driven, the low incidence, maybe the good weather, and maybe the absence, relative absence, of other respiratory tract infections this time of year. But we do feel ready to surge with testing if needed. And then to wrap around that, of course, is the getting in touch with cases, making sure they're staying isolated, learning about who their contacts are, then reaching out to those contacts and getting them quarantined. And we've built up a staff. Right now we have about 30 full time equivalents operating and ready to go with new cases as they come in. And then we have funding from the CARES act to hire an additional 50, and then the state has also offered to help us with a roughly equivalent amount of surge help if we need it at any point. So we meet the metric there.

And then in terms of protecting high risk populations, our key metric is how many outbreaks we've had in the past several weeks and anything, you know, we're aiming for, to keep it under two. We've had an average of one and a half, meaning one or two every week in the past several weeks. So I think, you know, we're really looking good there. And I'm proud of our staff and grateful to the Health District and the Department of emergency management for all the effort that's gone into this and, more importantly, all the public health work that's been going on that underlies that.

So then moving on, I also want to just answer a couple of questions that have come up. One is, we've been asked if recent large gatherings are leading to increased cases. We haven't seen anything yet. Certainly bears remembering that the incubation period on average is four to six days from exposure to illness. If someone does catch it then it's usually a day or so till they get tested and another day till we get the results. So at a minimum, if there is an event that leads to transmission, it's going to be at least a week until we see that, and the incubation period can extend out to two weeks, and that would make, you know, up to three weeks. So one to three week observation period to get an idea of if transmission emerged from any event. So we're just not there yet. Certainly our hope is, and you know from watching the TV the little I've seen, thankfully most people in these large gatherings and protests have been, have been by and large wearing face coverings. The social, the physical distancing hasn't been as great. But it's good to see the face coverings.

We'd also like to just familiarize local residents and businesses about some key elements of what moving to phase two will look like. Gatherings can only occur if it's fewer than five people outside your home per week. Certainly, my suggestion is to try to identify a coherent group of five people. If you and your five, you know, your new group of five all have, you know, five different members, that really links together a lot of groups. So I would encourage you to try to keep the collective small if we move into phase two. And remember that right now, we are still in phase one until we hear otherwise from the state government. So keep those gatherings small and try to keep it the same people, and ideally the same cohort of that five that you share with others.

People over 60, those with underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, immunosuppression, should continue to stay home aside from essential business and errands. Non essential travel will be permitted, but limited to activities that are approved under the reopened phase 2 plan, and those will come with health and safety guidance to follow. For example, restaurants in phase two could reopen at limited onsite capacity with appropriate social distancing, no more than five customers per table, six feet between tables, and no bar seating area. For people who can work remotely, we still continue to encourage telework whenever possible. And it's good to remember that moving to phase two and allowing more business activity does not mean that everything's back to normal, as I already alluded to. We, other than those essential activities and the newly permitted ones, we'd really like folks to try to stay home, limit their social contacts, limit other contacts so that they reduce risk of transmission and then, should cases occur, the number of people that we have to track and who have been exposed is limited as well.

There are guidelines that employers will need to follow through all of the phases and these include limiting close contact with customers, trying to maintain physical distancing whenever possible of that six foot invisible barrier, if you will, and using other measures to block sneezes and cough if distancing isn't realistic. So for instance, in, in some food processing facilities, people have to work side by side and then they put plexiglass barriers between the workers. Ensuring sanitation and hygiene are available to all workers and visitors. That means adequate soap and warm water and towels for handwashing on the way in, and on the way out, after going to the bathroom, before eating, and then hand hygiene available frequently, and making sure that staff are engaging in hand hygiene and hand washing frequently. Frequently cleaning and disinfecting workspace, especially high touch surfaces like countertops, telephones, door handles, handles on machinery, etc.

Use of face coverings. Remember that effective Monday, June 8, all employers must provide face coverings for their staff, require their staff to wear them unless they have a medical reason not to do so, and post signage encouraging clients and customers to wear face coverings when in the facility or the building. Enterprises may elect to require cloth face covering use by clients and customers, that's a decision left up to the proprietor.

Making a plan for addressing illness in employees if they occur while they're at work, including having a way for them to report illness when they're at work, get, if they're not masked, get a mask on and get out of the building and get home. And then requiring ill employees to stay home and pursue COVID 19 testing and not return until they've been cleared to do so. Providing information to employees about COVID 19 and illness prevention. This could include signs or posters with information as well as a group or one on one education. And following any additional guidance that is specific to your industry, as provided by local, state, or federal public health professionals. Much of this information, you can find on the labor and industries COVID 19 website as well as the coronavirus.wa.gov safe start website.

For those businesses for whom guidance is still pending, we encourage you to keep an eye on that safe start website and then adopt it as it becomes available. So this is just a brief overview, but businesses should visit those sites and keep an eye on that as time passes, and thank you for your time and attention. I'd like to pass it back to the Executive Somers.

**Dave Somers:** Thank you, doctor. The first question we have here is for you. Where is the health district with the state's 24/48 goal for contact tracing and what percent of contact tracing cases is the health district reaching in 24 hours and what is the percentage of those contexts being contacted in 48 hours?

**Chris Spitters:** Sure. So I'm just, want to give you the right numbers here. So I'm just going to try to pull that up on my screen while we speak. Thank you for waiting. But I'm having trouble pulling it up. So I'm just going to tell you. First, we're doing a great job of getting the investigations initiated. Over 90% are initiated, that is assigned, within 24 hours. We get to about 70% within 24 hours, meaning we achieve contact within 24 hours of initiating. Excuse me. So there's a, the minute the health department gets the case report from the laboratory or the health care provider, the clock begins ticking. Then the case is assigned. That's occurring quickly, within 24 hours. And then the goal is to contact that case within 24 hours of notification. We're at about 70% roughly within 24 hours. We hit 90% at 48 hours. So we are getting it done within the next working day. But we do have some room for improvement on trying to scooch that up a little bit and get it all done on the first day. Some of that, we do lose a little time from when the state health department gets the laboratory report the clock starts ticking. So sometimes there are several working hours lost by the time we receive the case. But it looks like with great efficacy we're reaching all cases by the end of the next work day. We just want to improve that and get that as much as possible into the same work day

With respect to contacts, we're doing very well. And we're hitting a 90% mark at 48 hours. So the, the other element there is reaching out and contacting all those cases and their contacts, who are in isolation and quarantine respectively, and checking in with them every day. Make sure they are staying home, see if they have any questions, see if they need any help or referrals to cooperate with the effort. And so that's a part of the activity as well. And we're engaging in that.

**Dave Somers:** So the next question is how will the county monitor business compliance and outside gatherings? I'll just start on that in that we're going to really rely on our residents to let us know if the rules aren't being followed. The first line of defense is if you see a business that is not really following the rules and does not have the protective measures in place, don't frequent that business. Just stay safe, use good judgment. Let us know about it. We'll let the Health District know and others, and we'll try to get in contact with that business and remedy the situation. Doctor, you may have some more formal mechanisms.

**Chris Spitters:** That's right and our, certainly our preference and first choice is, one, businesses thinking forward and thinking of what's good for them. Comfortable, safe, healthy customers are good for business and I think customers are going to be more likely to patronize if they feel safe and comfortable entering and doing business in an enterprise. So there's that. As you said, executive Somers, and then people, you know, being discriminating in your use of businesses. If a place makes you feel uncomfortable because the staff aren't wearing face coverings or there's inadequate spacing between people, you know, then think about trying to patronize somewhere that can provide you a safe environment. And then certainly with those businesses or other enterprises, workplaces that are not maintaining a safe either workplace or customer interface, we want to start with education. Make sure they have all the information they need and trying to help folks voluntarily meet our, our objectives here. And then certainly if there are noteworthy unsafe work settings or commercial enterprises that are endangering the well being of the staff or the clients or customers, then, you know, we may pursue further remedy either through labor and industries, business licensing, or the health district's powers to try to help them see the importance of conforming to the guidance.

**Dave Somers:** I'll just add to that that will largely depend on also the type of business and where it's located. If it's in a city and there's city business licenses that are in effect, those can be revoked clear up to being contacted by the Attorney General as was the barber in Snohomish. Snohomish County as a government does not issue business licenses, so we do not have that ability in unincorporated County, but certainly contacting the business owner, encouraging people not to frequent that business, and I think people need to remember, too, there's, for private business owners, there's significant potential liability if you're breaking the rules and somebody becomes ill and can trace it back to their contact your establishment. I think smart business owners will comply with the rules and will just put pressure on the rest to comply. I'm expecting we'll, it will have good compliance. People do not want to backslide. This has been, you know, very difficult times for everybody. So I think the vast majority of business owners will be happy to comply.

**Chris Spitters:** May I add, executive Somers, just that for employees who feel that they're not being taken care of in their work setting with respect to safety, there is a labor and industries call center. You can find that on the LNI website, LNI.gov or LNI.wa.gov, you can Google it, I'm not sure which. And then remember that the governor's website has a, has a center for consumers or anyone really to submit a complaint about a business if they think they're not following guidance.

**Dave Somers:** Any other questions? Is there enough pipe for biz? PPE. That makes more sense.

**Chris Spitters:** You know I'll speak to what I know. You know, we're doing all right with PPE in the healthcare system, EMS. As businesses come on and some of them need PPE to conform

with that guidance, I can't, I don't know, honestly. I will have I'll have to look into that. I don't know, executive Somers, if you have information from DEM about that?

**Dave Somers:** Well, we are working with our businesses. We've been in frequent contact. In fact, we were having daily briefings so many of our businesses were in on. So we're doing our best through our department of emergency management to make sure, first of all, the first line responders and our medical facilities and senior facilities are adequately supplied. And at the current time we have adequate supply and we have more in the pipeline. So I feel really good about that. When it comes to individual businesses, we're still in discussions on what role the county may be able to play to make sure that there are supplies and I think particularly for smaller businesses we'll be in a position to assist at some level. We have not had really direct requests for PPE. I think most businesses have seen the guidelines, they've been out for many, many weeks, they have been working on securing what they need for their own business, but we will continue to have our department of emergency management activated and working and if it becomes clear that there is a kink in the pipeline or some difficulties with businesses, we'll step in to help as we can because we are able to make large orders of PPE and get those sorts of resources to the county. So we will assist.

Anything else?

**Joint Information Center:** This is Kari Bray in the Joint Information Center. I'm not seeing any additional questions so if there are no other questions, we'll go ahead and wrap up for today. Just a reminder that this video will be available online by noon, and please stay tuned for future media availabilities.