TRANSCRIPT: Snohomish County Response to COVID-19, June 26, 2020, Briefing

**Executive Dave Somers:** Today marks the 21st day since we were allowed to transition into phase two of the governor’s safe start Washington effort. So this is really the first day that we would technically be able to apply for the next phase or going to phase three. Unfortunately, we are not going to be able to do that today. So like our neighbors, both to the south and to the north, Pierce, King, Whatcom and Skagit counties, our numbers have not stabilized enough. In fact they’ve trended up slightly. I know if we applied today we would be denied. And I’m extremely disappointed as I know you all are also. We were very hopeful that we would be able to move to phase three quickly, but we really need more time to see if this trend is an anomaly or a longer term trend. So we’re aware people have planned things like weddings, funerals, memorial services, gatherings on the Fourth of July holiday. We really need to make our decisions based on science and good data. So I’m going to ask for your patience and understanding in this, that we may not be far away from applying, but we need to understand exactly what’s happening with our trends and I know Dr. Spitters will address that more. So I just want to stress that really our future and our fate and our ability to move into phase three is really in your hands.

I’ve got stress more strongly than ever that if you’re out in public and around other people, please wear face coverings. We know it helps. Please maintain your distance. And with face coverings, when you wear a face covering it shows that you care about the people you’re around, your neighbors, your friends, other members of public just out and about, that you care about them, their health, the health of their friends and their families. So please wear face coverings. It also shows that you care about our businesses that are suffering as we’re still in phase two, so can’t emphasize that enough. Good graphic example somebody pointed out to me the other day. If you think on a cold winter day when you can see your breath shooting out. That's warm, moist air that carries virus, potentially, and I know we’re in the middle of summer and nice weather, but think about that. And masks mediate that. They really help prevent and reduce the spread of the virus. So please wear masks. The governor’s order goes into effect today and I hope you all take very, very seriously.

One other reminder. If you own a small business and have not yet applied for a small business grant, today at 5 p.m. is the deadline. So go to workforce snohomish.org to get more information. And with that, I'll hand it over to Dr. Spitters.

**Chris Spitters:** All right, good morning everyone, or good afternoon. Thank you, executive Somers. And yes, I'd like to echo executive Somers’ regrets about not feeling comfortable forging ahead toward phase three at this time, but I think after I share with you some information you'll see why we’re thinking that way. I think our overarching message is that we need everyone’s help to move ahead to phase three and four and beyond. But we’re definitely not going to be in phase three by the July 4 weekend and I want to share with you some of the key recent information that we’ve gathered that underlies that situation. So toward that end, I'm going to try to share my screen with all of you. And forgive me, I'm managing multiple screens here and will do my best to get that up for you. *(See slides at end of this transcript.)*

So you should be seeing now a figure from the Washington State Department of Health’s Risk dashboard for coronavirus that talks, assesses the risk of going forward through the various phases. So this shows data for Snohomish County and you can see that we’re, our rate has gone up a little bit. I'll show you more detail on that. We were down around 20 a week or two
ago, that's increased a little bit. And along with that, the positivity rate and testing and the number of tests per positive case, which are just two sides of the same coin, those are not, those are moving away from the target. We were approximating the target but they're moving away. Fortunately, our healthcare capacity is in good shape. But these figures are largely driven by this next figure I'm showing you, which across the bottom line we're moving from left to right in time, back from the beginning of March. And the green line shows what the cumulative or what the incidence, the number of cases per 14 day period per 100,000 people. And so that's, you may recall that 25 is the target, the governor and the state health department's target, which we would like to stay beneath as we move through the safe start reopening. And so, you know, we peaked up around 130 cases per two weeks per hundred thousand back in late March. And things came down quickly then kind of flattened out. And then we had been over the preceding several weeks relatively flat and even eclipsed below that target, but in the past week, we've got data in showing that things are rising back up, similar to what other counties in the region are reporting and as you might have heard across the country other states are experiencing this as well. And so although we're still doing lots of testing, these gray bars show how many tests are being done every day, which is anywhere from four- to eight-hundred, sometimes on the weekends things go down a bit and there's only 100 or 200 tests. But collectively over a week we're doing about 2,500 tests a week. These little blue bars are the positive tests and you can see there's a little spike there and so that raises up the positivity rate. So that's not only a concern for the phase application metrics, but in reality it suggests to us that there are positive cases out there that we previously weren't aware of and they could be spreading the disease.

This figure just shows you the inverse of that, which is the number of tests done per positive. The more tests you're doing per positive, the better you feel that you're, you know, reaching the whole population and trying to do a better job of finding all the cases. And so we were approaching that target of 50 tests per positive a week or two ago, but that has since come down and that just really matches what's, it's the converse of what we're seeing with the increased number of cases. And this just shows the sustained bit of good news around the hospitals, a little bit of up and down, but over the first couple of weeks of June overall we're staying at about 25 to 35 hospitalized COVID patients per day at any one time across the county across all four hospitals. Overall that's about only 3%, 3 to 4% of hospitalizations right now are do COVID. That's below the target of 10. And all the hospitals have a 20% surge capacity right now so we're good on that front.

Going back to the cases, this is something that we discussed on Tuesday and I just wanted to update you on. These are the number of cases reported per day as we move across time from left to right. And you can see this has the same shape as that line figure I showed you a few minutes earlier where we peaked in late March and then things came down. This figure, the case reports per day is a little bit less, you know, bouncy. It goes up and down a little more because multiple factors enter into the date that a case gets reported. So, some days of the week there's more testing done. Patients seek health care on some days of the week more than others, and other aspects of that sequence of events between feeling sick, getting tested, getting a result, and getting reported lead to ups and downs in that. But you can see that the ups and downs generally have been below 20 cases per day over the past several weeks with a couple of up into the 20s, but then Friday last week 35 cases, low over the weekend and then against 77 cases on Monday. And that really gave us pause as you'll recall from our press briefing on Tuesday. And we've looked at, we've combined that Friday through Monday period of about 130 cases. And we've now reached about half of those cases to talk to them. We don't
have complete information. But what it does tell us is are a few things. This group is a little bit younger than average. Over the course of the outbreak, the average age the, you know, 50% of the cases are younger than 50 to 55, 50% are older. This has shifted down. More of the cases in the younger years of life, and the midway point is somewhere in the late 30s, early 40s. So it's a younger group. It's less, fewer hospitalizations, down around 3 to 4% hospitalized. And most of the cases either are known contact of someone that had COVID, and so that's relatively reassuring because we can connect them to someone. What are more concerning are the equal number of cases in that are, they don't have an identified risk factor. They don't work in a healthcare facility, they haven't visited anyone in a healthcare facility, they don't work in a high risk, another high risk occupation and they don't know anyone who's had COVID. And so that's what we call community transmission. It really means we don't know where it came from. And so that's, in public health, that's not a good thing because it means that there's circulation of the virus occurring and we haven't wrapped, fully wrapped our arms around that. And we don't know where all the cases are coming from. And the proportion of cases over the past week or two that have that feature has also bumped up a bit. So it's all consistent with something in the past couple of weeks. Maybe it was Memorial Day. Maybe it's just natural increase in human activity since we moved into phase two. But there's a little bit of an increase in transmission and cases occurring. Fortunately, that hasn't shown up in the hospitals yet. The other thing I just would want to mention is that the relative hotspots remain. Everett is usually the largest number of cases over any period of time that we look at. And, but Marysville is emerging as an area where there are more and more cases. That was the second leading city in that sequence of four days last week and also the second leading city over the last two weeks. Amongst all those cases reported over the last weekend, we did find, you know, clusters of households that are, not all of them, but many are connected by social networks within those neighborhoods. So that's, we're working with the affected families and communities there to make sure everyone's getting isolated. Get the case, get the contacts into quarantine and then anyone that gets symptoms definitely gets tested and then trying to test everyone else in the household, even if they don't have symptoms just to detect any additional cases. So that's where things are at there. That's the features of our world right now that underlie what executive Somers has shared with you.

A couple of other thoughts I want to share, we've been getting signals, various reports from the community about large gatherings occurring, and in a manner and size that are quite large. I mentioned on Tuesday, a party of about 70 young adults who had a party on last Friday night, June 19, and at the time that we spoke on Tuesday I felt we were going to have pretty good success and just through the attendees finding all those folks. Well, after talking to, doing some early work in the last couple days we've discovered that it was one of those parties where people showed up that the host and the core friends of the host didn't know. And so there are a lot of people that went to that party that we are not going to be able to reach through our traditional methods. So I'm hereby letting you know and sort of taking a step back from my stance on Tuesday that we do want to let you know that that party occurred and Stanwood on Friday night, June 19. Estimated attendance was 40 to 70 attendees. If you are one of the people who attended that party, we, the Health District recommends that you, we consider you exposed to COVID-19. We don't know how close your exposure was to the case that was detected there. But, consequently, we're recommending that you stay home until July 4, through July 4, that's the 14 day incubation period. And we recommend that you go ahead and seek testing, either through your healthcare provider or go to one of the health district's testing sites that you can identify on our website. And so that extends through July 4. That's not the only
large gathering we’ve heard about. It’s the most specific history we’ve gotten, but many other large gatherings have occurred that are not amongst the weddings and funerals that are permitted through the governor’s safe start guidance. These are just spontaneous or planned gatherings that exceed the permitted size. And it’s, you know, I guess, in some sense, it seems like we’re trying to control folks, but with good reason. And so we’re just encouraging people to limit your gatherings to permitted sizes, which is five people who are not your household members. Limit unnecessary travel. Please as executive Somers said, and we can’t emphasize enough, the importance and the effectiveness of face coverings in preventing transmission. It really, those masks really do protect others, really do catch all those droplets and prevent creating clouds or sending droplets that land on things or people that can transmit to others.

And my last plea is for all of us. When the Health District tries to engage you because you’ve been identified as a contact or a case, please respond promptly. Answer the phone. If we leave a message or text you, please respond in the same day. It's important to protect your health, the health of the people around you, and our performance in this is important in limiting transmission and being able to move forward in reopening. All these elements are really important. So really our pathway to phase three goes through all of us. And I urge you to think about others, think about the community at large, and wear those face coverings, and please work with us in following this guidance.

Dave Somers: Great. Thank you, Dr. Spitters. We’ve got a couple of questions in the chat box. First of all, your numbers appear much better than Pierce. Why not apply for a modified phase two that would allow for larger gatherings? And I’ll start with that. We have been discussing that, have been in communication with executive Dammeier in Pierce County. They indicated they are considering submitting an application towards the end of next week for a modified phase two. We are looking at what they’re proposing, the general theory behind it is there would be emphasizing loosening restrictions a bit on outdoor gatherings. So kind of the lower risk end of potential activities. We’re going to take a look at that next week. We want to see how our numbers are doing. We want to understand the details of what they’re proposing and also get in conversation with the governor’s office about their thoughts on that. But that is something under consideration. We’re not ready to do that at this time.

Dr. Spitters, you want to add to that?

Chris Spitters: Yes. And, you know, certainly there are elements of what Pierce County is proposing to do that could make sense. But, you know, in the immediate time we’ve got this, I really want to focus on Snohomish County and not what the neighbors are doing. I think what we’re doing in general is, as executive Somers mentioned, we’re kind of all in the same boat here. How, the details on how we address it going forward, you know, are probably going to be more similar than different in the long run, but right now as the health officer my job is to figure out what happened last weekend or what led up to it and to make sure that we limit its impact going forward and, you know, I think it’s like, when speaking to others I’ve likened it to driving on ice, and low velocity is the best speed, they key, because if you get going and you have to hit the brakes it’s going to be a while before you really slow down.

Dave Somers: I just want to add, part of our concern is that when we moved into phase two we asked people to socially distance and wear masks and those, we were very hopeful that we would continue to see continued reduction in the case count by using those protective measures. And what we’re seeing is an upward trend. So part of the difficulty of all this is as we
open up more, it sends a signal out to our residents that things are getting better and, you know, there's less cause for concern, and that is not the case. So, you know, I'm really hopeful that folks will get much more serious about masks and distancing. And if we see that trend turn around, I'm going to push as hard as I can to get us open as quickly as we can, but it really is up to each and every one of you to take those protective measures and help this, help us be successful.

There's a question. Is there any chance Snohomish County would have to move back into phase one. I'd say we are a long way from that. I mean the trends are up a bit, but I don't see any imminent threat of that. We have had no discussions with the state or even internally what that would even look like so, you know, again, we'll have to see how the trends are going and, you know, take this one step at a time. But no, there's no discussion of that that I'm aware of.

**Chris Spitters:** Agreed, executive Somers. It's not. You know, is it on the list of possibilities? Sure. But we're not anticipating that and hopefully with the cooperation of all of us to take the measures that are in our hands to prevent transmission to others, limit activity, limit gathering size, wear those face coverings, and then us doing our work here at the health district to contain what we have detected and reach out to any affected communities that seem disproportionately affected, we should be able to avert that. And the early signals with the hospitals still looking as they did a couple weeks ago suggest that we would not, that that's not in our future, but we all need to be vigilant and, you know, act accordingly.

I want, I want to add one thing about those face coverings. I just had a meeting before this with the chief medical officers of all the hospitals and the major clinics in town, and I wanted to mention a message that they collectively wanted me to deliver on their behalf. They're already receiving lots of letters, requests for medical exclusions from wearing a face covering. And in general, institution by institution and collectively, their general policy is not to issue such letters and that it's very, the true medical contraindications or reasons not to use a face covering are very limited and the message is if you have one of those and you can't go out in public and use a face covering, stay home. That's the medical community's advice on that front.

**Dave Somers:** Doctor, are we seeing a general trend in those that are testing positive towards younger, a younger population? I know early on, the majority of cases were in the older population, but in many parts of the country, they're seeing a trend towards younger population. Do we have data on that? Are we seeing that same trend?

**Chris Spitters:** We have slowly seen over time, a trend toward the data suggesting younger, you know, a younger midpoint of all, of the full age range as we move across time. Now, that makes sense overall given that back in January, February, March, testing was limited. Generally limited to people who are quite ill and either, you know, in the emergency department or being hospitalized. And because advanced age is a risk factor for that, we had a, you know, that was what we call a biased sample, it wasn't really representative of all the infections that are out there. We were just testing the sickest people who also happened to be older than the average age of infections. As testing has become more available, we've seen that average age go down as younger people have accessed testing. And so I think that that's what we're witnessing.

**Dave Somers:** Thank you. I'll just say, we've seen around the country, it seems like younger folks and populations are much less concerned about the virus and having these gatherings of, I've got to say, first of all young people can be infected, get very sick and die from this. And so
you should be concerned about your own health. But beyond that, you can be a transmitter to your family and friends, you know, parents, grandparents, others. So that's a huge part of our concern. And we just ask you, even though, if you don't feel a strong personal concern for your own safety and health, first of all, you should. And second, think of other people.

There's another question. Given the recent numbers of new infections, when would you estimate is the earliest we would see an application to phase three? Doctor?

**Chris Spitters:** Well, you know, I think I'm going to borrow from Dr. Fauci and say, you know, the virus has given us the information on our timelines. And so, like executive Somers, I'm eager for us to move forward. But I can't give you a number of days. I can tell you the process by which we approach this. I think that's what's more relevant and valuable, is we need to understand that last weekend was a blip, or the beginning of a trend, and we can't tell that in three to five days. That's going to take a week or two to see that, you know, do we see the previous level of daily case reports reestablished and the hospitals remain relatively unburdened and we see our testing positivity rates kind of drift back toward the lower numbers we were at earlier in the month? Or do we see, you know, this time next week, are we looking at we're seeing 20 or 30 or 40 cases reported a day, and the hospitalizations for COVID are increasing? Those would be two different branches, you know, two clear distinct branches in our pathway going ahead. So that fork in the road is ahead but I can't tell you which path we're taking because we can't see that far down the road yet, but we're watching every day and in close communication with the executive and his team about it. And I really appreciate their support throughout all of this.

**Dave Somers:** So there was an earlier question about any of the increase in cases have been linked to protest directly. Do we have that information?

**Chris Spitters:** We are asking cases and we haven't heard, we haven't heard anything about connection to attending a protest. It may be out there, but at this point that we're now three weeks after the, more than that, after the protests began. We should have seen something from that and, you know, maybe these cases reported last weekend were in part connected to that, but we're not hearing that from the people when we interview them and ask about it.

**Dave Somers:** Any more questions?

**Joint Information Center:** Thank you everyone. This is Kari Bray in the joint Information Center. It looks like we've gotten through the questions that were in the chat box. So thank you again, everyone, for joining us. Please stay tuned for future media availabilities and again this video and a transcript will be available online later today. Thanks.

**Dave Somers:** Thank you.
COVID-19 in Washington State

County Phases and Risk Assessment

This map shows the current phases and the key metrics used to determine county readiness to move between phases. Select a county to see the status of key metrics for that particular county, or select a key metric for additional detail.

Snohomish County key metrics - currently in Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Meeting Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate per 100K of newly diagnosed cases during the prior two weeks</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals tested for each new case during the prior week</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>&gt;50</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of individuals testing positive for COVID-19 during the past week</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of licensed beds occupied by patients</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>&lt;80%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of licensed beds occupied by COVID-19 cases</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Washington State Department of Health
Snohomish County COVID-19 Case Rate per 100,000 for 2-week Rolling Periods March 1 - June 20, 2020

Target <25 cases per 100,000
COVID-19 in Washington State

Number of Individuals Tested by Specimen Collection Date

Testing for COVID-19 has been steadily increasing in Washington. Beginning in late March, drive-through testing became available in some communities, which increased testing availability.

Number of Individuals Tested

- 7.3% of individuals tested positive
  - Positive
  - Positive (Data Incomplete)
  - Negative
  - Negative (Data Incomplete)

98,905 out of 495,498 test results do not have an assigned county.

Testing

Number of individuals tested per new case

This graph shows the trend in the number of individuals tested for each new case over a one week period. The most recent period is from June 12 through June 18. The Department of Health recommends a level of testing greater than 50 times the number of new cases during the prior week.

Snookomish County

- Number of individuals tested for each new case during the prior week: 29.7
- Meeting goal of testing more than 50 times the number of new cases: No

Supporting detail

- Avg. number of individuals tested daily the past week: 479.6
- Avg. number of daily cases over the past week: 16.1

Sources: Washington State Department of Health
Snohomish County COVID-19 Hospitalizations by Date

Mean: 42.7; Median: 38.5; Range 24-67
Number of Reported COVID-19 Cases in Snohomish County, by Date

[Bar chart showing the number of reported COVID-19 cases over time, with peaks and troughs indicated by different bars. The x-axis represents dates from early 2020 to late 2020, and the y-axis represents the number of cases ranging from 0 to 160.]
Weekly Percent of Snohomish County COVID-19 Cases by Type of Exposure and Onset Date

- Close contact
- Community acquired
- Healthcare Associated
- LTCF Associated

Percent of Weekly Total

Dates:
- 3/13-3/20/2020
- 3/20-3/27/2020
- 3/27-4/3/2020
- 4/3-4/10/2020
- 4/10-4/17/2020
- 4/17-4/24/2020
- 4/24-5/1/2020
- 5/1-5/8/2020
- 5/8-5/15/2020
- 5/15-5/22/2020
- 5/22-5/29/2020
- 5/29-6/5/2020
- 6/5-6/12/2020
- 6/12-6/19/2020