

MEDIA AVAILABILITY- FEBRUARY 23, 2021

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Well, thank you good morning thanks for joining us today good to see you all. So in Snohomish County we're really continuing to focus on vaccinating as many of our residences quickly and safely as possible that's our priority. So in a minute, Jason Biermann, our director of emergency management, it will be providing details on how the storms across the United States have impacted vaccine supply. And the continuing challenges we face with an unpredictable and inadequate supply of vaccines. it's really frustrating for all of us not to have more dependable supplies every week it makes it difficult to plan. But we are optimistic it's going to be to get better with time, and as the impacts from the storms diminish, so I want to make sure that our residents know that all groups that have been more adversely impacted by COVID. Including our seniors will remain priorities for us so with that I'll hand it over to Dr. Spitters from Snohomish Health District.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Thank you Executive Somers, and good morning everyone. So we're continuing to see the case rates decreasing that two week case right that we follow again, the number of cases per hundred thousand residents in the 14 days. for the current period leading up to last Saturday February 20 that had dropped down another notch to 119 it was up at 142 up through. The 13th of February and you'll recall that it peaked at 440 in late December so that's a 75% drop off of the peak. And just you know continued progress and getting toward our goal, you know our ultimate goal of course is zero, but at least getting down below 25 to 50 cases per hundred thousand. For two weeks so we're on our way let's keep up the momentum we've also seen a significant decline in the number of hospitalizations deaths and cases in long term care facilities. hospitalizations do the COVID had now been steady for a couple of weeks with 30 to 40 COVID cases in the hospital at any one time and. The number of new hospitalizations each week markedly reduced off the peak there were just five residents who died from COVID and the weekend in February 13. Going back one month we were averaging about 20 deaths per week and going back two months 30 deaths per week so again a much improved situation there. For the weekend in February 13 there was just one newly reported case in a long term care facility that I find that truly remarkable. Compare that to late December and early January, where we were seeing 80 to 90 new cases each week. And at that time, virtually every skilled nursing facility in Snohomish County had one or more cases in the building within the prior several weeks. Now, only to have 17 skilled nursing facilities in Snohomish County have had a case in the building and the prior 28 days. it's just a remarkable improvement and this decrease in nursing home cases offers much relief to the residents, their families and the staff. As well as to the health care system at large, there are several reasons, contributing to the improvement, although it's hard to sort out how much is due to each factor. But certainly the high transmission saturating the number of susceptible people, especially among the residents. And then, leading to a decrease in the number of new infections that are even possible that's certainly had a role, improved infection prevention measures as facilities encounter cases and learn from. You know, learn from experience in counseling and then certainly not least, would be the vaccination effort that's rolling out addressing. residents and staff of long term care facilities and assisted living facilities or of skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities as that's gaining. momentum and coverage throughout the county I think that the number of susceptible in nursing homes, is just reducing markedly and that's why we're seeing what we're seeing. On the vaccine front I'd like to share some

preliminary numbers and updates last week again more than 25,000 vaccine doses were administered in Snohomish County. We now have about 92,000 people who have received their first dose and 29,000 who are fully vaccinated combined together that's more than 120,000 total COVID 19 vaccine doses that have been administered here in Snohomish County in just 10 weeks. There were shipment delays experience nationwide because of winter weather in many parts of the country, however, those delayed shipments have started to arrive, and we expect the remaining deliveries to come in the next day or two. On top of those deliveries from last week's held up supplies will also be receiving about 30,000 more vaccines for this week's regularly scheduled shipments. Of those about 10,000 our first doses and 20,000 for second dose is again as we try to catch up on people who are coming up on their third or fourth weekend are due for that second dose. These updated vaccine numbers will be posted on the Health Districts covert 19 vaccine website later this morning. As we have more vaccines coming in and more providers entering information, this is increasing the amount of time it takes for our staff to. prepare the data for presentation, because of this starting next week, we will begin publishing vaccine data on Thursdays, rather than on Tuesdays, as we have been doing up through today. The last quick update is on the launch of prep mode that's the new appointment system we've been discussing the teams will be doing some beta testing for mobile clinics this week and next and we plan to launch a broader. We plan to launch that platform on a broader scale, after that beta testing to share more on the vaccine Task Force operations I'll turn it over to Jason Biermann, with the Department of Emergency Management. Jason.

Jason Biermann, Snohomish County DEM: Thanks Dr. Spitters and Executive Somers good morning everyone two things i'd like to talk about this morning, and of course the first one is the mass vaccination effort, but just to give folks a little bit of background. Throughout this entire response, which is now over a year long, we have seen a lot of evolving information changing policies challenges with resources. which generally all sort of leads to us having to adapt our operations and the vaccine work we're doing is no exception and Dr. Spitters just mentioned some of the challenges. As folks know we can be in this know Holmes county vaccine Task Force back in July, at a time when we weren't sure which vaccine candidates would actually be approved. When for sure they would arrive in Snohomish County or what the administration system and distribution systems would look like. We spent a lot of time initially talking about how much of this could just go through our normal healthcare systems. But fortunately we plan mass vaccination sites, because we believed we would need them, we didn't know when for sure, but we believe that we would need them. And we knew absolutely that the goal to getting everyone in the county vaccinated as quickly and safely as possible was going to take more than just our existing health care system. So we did a lot of planning around that as soon as vaccines started arriving in the county in December. We recognize that we were going to have to help support the healthcare system pretty quickly. At that time, folks will remember, we were in Phase 1A which was primarily healthcare settings healthcare workers first responders in direct contact with potential COVID patients and folks working in long term care facilities. The next group for vaccination at that point had not even been determined or defined by the state, so we're really working you know planning and working with a really small group of people. Now that we're in Phase 1B, one that number of people is much larger and so we've expanded from one site to now for sites. walk inside at the Boeing Activity Center in Everett and drive through sites and Edmonds, Monroe and Arlington. it's also important to note that we have teams that are going out. into our community to vaccinate at adult family homes and we're in the process of planning additional

Community based clinics, to help serve some of our marginalized populations throughout the county so with all that background, and all that pre work that was done, I just want to say there's been. there's been a lot of success and Dr. Spitters mentioned that overall number of folks who've been vaccinated about half of those folks have been received their first dose at one of our mass vaccination sites. We know we're still a long ways off from getting the over 600,000 Snohomish County residents that we know will want to be vaccinated actually completely vaccinated but we're making good progress. Our long term care facilities staff and residents are getting vaccinated through a combination of a federal pharmacy program and our mobile of. Resources that we've done in partnership with our firing teams, along with private providers and those who make it to our mass vaccination sites. In Snohomish County right now all 18 of our skilled nursing facilities and our 46 Assisted Living facilities have had on site vaccination clinics. and of the 615 adult family homes in our county, we believe, by next week, at least the first dose will be will have been an administrator in all 615 of those settings that's a pretty big accomplishment in a pretty short amount of time. Dr. Spitters mentioned some of the challenges we have been focused, for the last couple of weeks on getting information out to folks about getting their second dose the state has really emphasized. folks getting their second doses, we are working to launch a new registration system called prep mode, which he mentioned. And that we believe is going to vastly improved folks ability to sign up for first and then get signed up for second doses. we've done work to make sure that we have consistent times for when appointments get posted consistent times for when our clinics are open and operational. And we're also expanding staffing and capacity at our call Center so folks who have questions, who may need help in other languages. And, or just unable to register online because of technology challenges we're expanding the capacity so that you have a number, where you can call in and get assistance from us. We know there been other hurdles. This is an operation at a scale that we haven't done quite frankly, in terms of vaccines, I think, Dr. Spitters maybe would even say probably since the last large pandemic back in the early 1900s. We have partners working at every level of government, we have policies and impact us at every level of government and so no matter how much we planned and we planned quite a bit. There are things outside of our control and things that have happened that we couldn't predict. First and foremost that's folks have heard me say, and I think both the executive and Dr. Spitters is vaccine availability and a predictable vaccine supply That has been our biggest challenge. How much vaccine comes into the county drives how many sites, we have open it drives how many staff work at those sites that drives how many auxiliary staff are needed to support them and sometimes that literally changes day today. we're really grateful to our partners for their flexibility and ask the patients of the public and hope that they understand that, outside of our control is sometimes how we have to react to. Our ability to have some of these sites open or closed the weather is played a part we've had weather delays with vaccine shipments in the last week, which has led to most. We can, which was last week's allocation and now arriving at the same time with week 11. That means, essentially, we went from last week a fairly low number that Dr. Spitters mentioned, to a large number of vaccines in the county. To get ready for that we are prepared to, for example, at our early consigned to up capacity from the next few days to 1700 appointments per day. And, by the end of the week to have the capacity potentially even up to 3000 bucks per day that's a lot of folks going through, it requires a lot of staffing, a lot of coordination with the local jurisdiction and again a lot of patients as people go through the system. I will say that, from the beginning, I mentioned appointments not doses. We did make a decision early on that we would only open appointments when we had vaccine available, and that has been a hurdle for many people, we

know that is frustrating again that's based on supply, we only make vaccine appointments available when we actually have vaccine in hand. We know there have been some issues with the way the phasing has been set up and the prioritization We ask that folks please do wait for your face. If you see that you might be eligible to register or you see the opportunity to register for an appointment, but then you realize that you're not eligible. Please say that appointment for someone as and share the information so that they can get their appointment set up and if they do need help finding an appointment or signing up please have them contact the call Center. Among all of that, you know the last couple of things, I just want to touch on I mentioned the weather we've had wind blow over tense. At our sites and staff scrambling in the middle of the night to set those tents backup and resume operations in the morning. The snow is played an impact not just nationally on getting vaccine here but and in our need to shut down sites. And we've also had and many folks have heard throughout the nation. Some of the rumors and misinformation that has gone out we've had folks that I believe are well meaning, who have shared links to our vaccination appointment sites. Sometimes communicating that their first come, first serve our vaccination sites are not first come, first serve there by appointment only. And when we have folks who either show up without appointments or overload the system and they're not eligible that causes concerns for us and slows down our process. we've also heard concerns about folks who are getting vaccinated outside of the eligibility scope. that's not unique to us that's not unique to the State that's not unique to the country, it is something that we are working diligently to address. We have trainings and briefings for all the staff and volunteers, we require folks who make their appointments to attest, that when they make the appointment, that they are actually eligible, and we do check their ids on site. We've done a lot more outreach to try and let folks know that the sites are appointment only and we're continuing to develop and refine our processes for reaching out to folks who are eligible. So bottom line it's a lot of very complicated work complex work happening in a very short period of time in the middle of a pandemic. we're aware that everything has not gone perfectly, but we feel that the amount of progress we're making is quite good. When we look at where we were just a couple of short months ago with vaccines just having come into the county a couple of short months ago. and the last thing and I apologize for taking up the time but I felt i'd be remiss if I didn't mention. For my team and from the emergency management Community around the county in addition to the vaccines, we are continuing to provide PP. we've provided PPD over 8 million pieces of P to over 570 different agencies we've continued our partnership with strong partners like Sno- isle libraries to get. Right now over 800,000 face coverings out into the Community we've distributed business kits about 2500 of those out to our small business partners. And we are still continuing to run nourishing neighborhoods which has provided over 11,000 boxes of food to some of our most in need, families partnered with the boys and girls clubs to provide. Over two and a half million meals and over a million snacks to kids that are there at the Boys and Girls club a million dollars in support to. The school programs, and of course the ongoing work in isolation and quarantine site. Where they have so far been able to safely isolator quarantine over 300 county residents and make sure they had a place. To be while they were waiting to either determined that they were going to be diagnosed with COVID 19 or to make sure that they weren't out in the Community and inadvertently transmitting so. I apologize, Executive Somers, after Spitters I ran a little bit long but there's a lot to cover. Thank you so much for your time and I'll turn it back over to you, Executive Somers.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: No, that was great. Jason, thank you so much. First question is, what are the metrics us to show progress on vaccinations it's a rate of inoculations per 10,000 people. Snohomish County has consistently lagged behind most other counties all the other large counties, why is that happening and I'll just kick it off. And stand to be corrected, but supply has been the issue for us, we have had the capacity to deliver inoculations that far exceeds the amount of vaccine that we have and also early on, it was clear that we were getting. Fewer doses, and some other counties around the state and we complained about that I think that's largely been corrected, but any other points Jason or Dr. Spitters would like to add to that or correct when I said.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Well Executive Somers, I agree with what you've said, and I would just add that you know that's not all. Not all of our low allocation early was you know some unfairness, it certainly was dissatisfying but we per capita, you know. King county pierce county have a lot more health care providers, and I think you know the long term care facilities that sort of thing, so in that one a group. We just have a smaller population has a percentage of the total population, so we kind of fell behind in our allocations in part due to that, although that didn't stop us from. You know, being the squeaky wheel and trying to make sure that we're catching up and I as executive summary said, I think that things are improving and. So hopefully do much better, as we go forward. The one other thing I'd add is you know we're in a in a race and a competition against the virus, not against the neighbors. So that's you know, I have to admit, I had to look it up when you asked the question our real focus is on getting the people in Snohomish County. taken care of as quickly as we can, through the measures that Jason and his team are putting together and our world, meanwhile, doing all of our other containment efforts, so this is no simple task and but we're really focused on Snohomish County and moving us forward as fast as we can.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: And I think that you.

Jason Biermann, Snohomish County DEM: Thank you, kind of covers it all.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: So, based on the data that disappears you believe folks took your advice and played it safe on super bowl Sunday.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Well, I don't know the reason I don't know if it was my advice or just their own good rational thought. Or maybe we got lucky, but I do think that there was no impact at the soup no negative impact of the super bowl. On case rates and so that's a great thing I'm thankful to the Community for that, and I think that you know, collectively, we made a good choice as to how to enjoy that game and hopefully we'll continue to do that with like temptations as time passes.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Okay, one for Jason can you elaborate on the marginalized communities that the county will be trying to reach which communities are these and will the county be using smaller pop up clinics to target these groups.

Jason Biermann, Snohomish County DEM: yeah so the marginalized communities, we do know there are bypass communities that have been disproportionately affected by COVID 19 in terms of their impacts so executive summers along with some others reached out and we had a forum with a number of these groups. Including the NAACP see three members of the Latinex community. large number of groups to hear from them their concerns so we're doing that and working and close partnership with both the Health District, and the Executive's office of social justice. We, I will say we are not using the term pop up clinics we're using Community based clinics, we don't want to give the impression, and this was based partly on their feedback that. These will be sort of surprise events that folks will just will suddenly show up and anyone who's around can suddenly get the vaccine, we are trying to work with closely with them to plan. Community based in clinics with folks who are within the eligibility criteria, but I may have mobility challenges or other issues, and so that we can bring vaccines to them in a planned way, so I just did want to mention that these are not pop-up clinics.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Good, I'll just add that, based on the work we did during the census, we know that. There are communities throughout the county that might have access problems, it could be access to the Internet that could be a cultural issues, lack of. Access to Internet in the home and there's some social issues. Cultural issues that need to be addressed, so what we're doing is communicating with those groups and asking them, how can we best get out to your community. And let them know when they're eligible and when vaccines are available to them, so we're staying within the groups that the States set the age groups and other vulnerability group so not going outside of that, but we are communicating especially to make sure that everybody knows about the vaccine its safety and we're working with them to make sure that they have access to the next, the next question is originally Jason send a new scheduling system would launch last week, then Dr. Spitters, it would likely be this week, now it looks like it could be next week or even longer what's causing the whole but.

Jason Biermann, Snohomish County DEM: yeah, I'll address that one Dave um well, there are a number of things, one is access, so the system requires access for all the different sites, so we have to. there's an administrator piece of loading things then having the right folks identified to provide the inputs and then there's a training component where folks have to be trained to use the system to make sure they're using it correctly sort of bottom line, I would say. We know the system we have in place right now is not perfect, but folks have already been using it and we wanted this rollout to be. A notable improvement so we're trying to make sure that we have everything tied down in terms of training. The technology that has to be in place both out at the sites and the QA QC pieces, where we can look at things and make sure they're getting uploaded properly. We wanted to have all that in place, I know that means we're still using the same system. That we had been using and again we recognize that system is not is not perfect, but we really were committed to this one being markedly better and so we're just taking the time to make sure that it actually is, when we roll it out.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Jason, correct me if I'm wrong, but prep mode is a state system, so this is something that state has developed into pushing out to counties and other jurisdictions.

Jason Biermann, Snohomish County DEM: It is and so part of that rollout also means that we are in line with lots of others who are trying to roll out, and so the state's. There they're able their ability to assist is stretched a bit as well, so yeah there's it's a lots of folks trying to get them out into action, at the same time, we are.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Right, can you tell us more about the special education K six special education staff, in addition to the K to grade students and onsite staff, what are you hoping to learn from it and how will you use the information gathered.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: I confessed and not being certain what you mean by the special education K through six but you know, certainly I'll just speak to the overarching strategy for safety. You know, getting students back into school and that's to serve the neediest students, first, that would include kids with intellectual physical or mental health issues that require face to face. Teaching were remote learning snack and I hope and that's regardless of any age and that's been you know we've green lighted that back from the beginning, whether the student is five years old or 15 and then to layer in. cohort in groups, you know 5050 kind of on campus off campus. Over time, starting with that K through two but working on up through elementary and now our case rates countywide are such that when schools arrived, to the point where they've. slid back in all of their elementary school students, they could look at moving on into middle and high school if case rates continue to be stable or declining so. Overall I'm optimistic based on our experience, thus far, that cases do occur, and continue to occur in schools, but the transmission is unusual and widespread transmission we haven't seen it all and that matches the. Reports of others from around the state country and world, so we have cautious but forthright optimism in the schools moving ahead with that plan.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: So apparently that question was referring to the school districts participation in a testing study with the UW so we've directed her to contact them about that.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Study right yeah UW in there I've gotten together for a testing study and. that's great you know we will learn something about transmission I suspect it will reinforce what we already know is that cases will occur in schools, but that ongoing transmission and school settings will be unusual.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Snohomish Health District started getting multi week vaccine forecast from a state, if so, will that information be made public and any idea how many doses are going to be at the mass sites this week.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: No nothing a county level we've only seen statewide. forecasts and I think those come out in press releases, so I believe you will have seen those If not, we can get those forwarded to you that's public information that came out last week.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: You seniors are growing increasingly frustrated and feel left behind you've mentioned this new scheduling system that will create a waitlist and make things easier, can you explain how this will work and, specifically, how I could make things easier for seniors.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Well, I think the idea is that those that call in can have someone on our hotline, our COVID 19 hotline help them register, so it still the only way to register is through the Internet, but we can assist them through the telephone. And we're also working with some non governmental organizations and 501C3, so I think that work with older residents. Of the county to try to address this challenge as well, but that's an ongoing piece of work, but the basic idea is that they can call in and get registered and. Over the phone and if there are no spots available, they can get on a waiting list that then is becomes a call list when future doses open up. And then also, I would just mention, you know as well you know those sort of government and civil society, efforts to try to make it easier for our older residents who are not. Technology savvy or technology fluent can also be augmented by you know personal individual level efforts in neighborhoods families, etc, and trying to help our elders. You know, get connected and doing some of that work for them as well as friends family members neighbors etc that's something we can all do at the individual level, while our government and non government. Efforts forge ahead.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Given that we're getting the hospital system and, most of all hon populations vaccinated do you think it's likely that the previous way was the largest will experience of the pandemic, at least in terms of hospitalizations and deaths.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: In the short term sure long term I'm reluctant to make any long term. predictions about this virus and our experience with it, but I think that with the continued prevention efforts that we're all taking. Reference the super bowl comments earlier, and as we try to roll out this vaccine, you know it's really a race we're trying to we're trying to get as many people vaccinated before the next wave might occur and so. You know, be we all got to keep doing our part.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Jason mentioned opening up more appointments at mass vaccination sites, what else, are you doing to prepare for this higher volume this week and are you fully confident you'll be able to distribute the entire education in the short period of time. yeah So in addition to expanding capacity we're actually expanding days so we're anticipating some of the sites are going to be open, through the weekend. So just based on the throughput that we have available to us we're pretty comfortable if folks are signing up and showing up we'll be able to get them through, I know I mentioned on one of the earlier calls. availabilities we do have a significant amount of throughput capacity that were that were really not using yet because we don't have enough vaccines so. we're confident we can expand up and put this out into the Community, and then we still have additional capacity, and we have more vaccine.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: So we're going to have any concerns that will be able to get the vaccine out if we receive it. Any update on the vaccine equity data, the Health District requested from the State.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: yeah, we're you know, that database is a challenge for statisticians and epidemiologist to work with just because the when you've got so many different people entering data it's it takes a lot of. Work you know, cleaning we call it in epidemiology world that doesn't mean we're scrubbing or laundering it means where you know. Mountlake Terrace ends up entered 15 different ways and you got to figure out how to make that analyze you've got to clean that up. And so, our team was working on that data set last week and we should have something that's publicly visible. By the end of the week or early next week to share and then we would probably repeat that effort monthly it's such a substantial effort to take in that huge database clean it, you know, so this analyzer will and then present. That you know doing it more often than weekly it's going to be misallocation of efforts but we'll get something out toward the end of this week, early next week and then about monthly thereafter.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Regarding the john just scheduling two doses for each patient how long in between shots before the vaccine is considered ineffective.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: No one knows, we know that you know efficacy really picks up about seven to 14 days after the dose you really see the experience of people who got the vaccine and those who got the placebo separating. With the placebo folks continuing to get cases and the vaccinated folks stopping getting cases right around 14 days, but how long that lasts only time will tell, I would say all again and, though I you know not. shy away from predicting the future I would not be surprised that, if we need periodic and you will or there abouts boosters for COVID. Based on either waning immunity or changes and strains that are circulating much like we experienced with influenza vaccination yearly I would not be surprised if that's in our long term future, but time will tell, and nobody knows right now.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: For storage vaccines, how long before a single vaccine bile is effective or expired.

Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District: Well, it depends on the product and the temperature which it's being stored, but the ones that are frozen, you know, in the minus 70. Or, which is the Pfizer or the Moderna stored at minus 20 those are good for months and months, stored at that temperature once you bring them out and. thought of them and start using them you've got just the rest of the day, to use whatever is not used up by the rest of the day, has to go in the garbage so hope that helps.

Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive: Great, I think that does it. Thanks everybody for your questions, there's a link, also in the chat box to the Department of Health. Information about the three week outlook for vaccine distribution. Thank you.