

MEDIA AVAILABILITY- MARCH 16, 2021

Dave Somers: Thank you and good morning everybody. Good to see you here. Thanks for joining us, so Snohomish County is really relied on a number of key partnerships during the pandemic, of course, our partnership with Snohomish Health District has been great. Doctor, thank you so much, we really came together early as a team, and I very much appreciate that partnerships, thank you. Another one is our partnership with County Council and we've been working closely with the Council, particularly to Stephanie Wright and vice chair Megan Dunn. to really make sure that we're addressing the most urgent issues that our residents are facing in our Council members here from residents, often, as do I. So the yesterday, the County Council approved the re appropriation of federal cares that funds easier dollars that were appropriate last year. But that they really ensure our response can continue while we're waiting for the new federal stimulus package. So a couple of the expenditure, the proposed, the Council and they approved yesterday versus \$1 million. Which is going to allow us to find additional small businesses who have already applied to the relief recovery and resiliency program that we refer to as our three net or three grants program is helping businesses impacted by the pandemic with direct grants. Get businesses that previously applied to, there are three programs will be considered for the funding so we're not reopening the application process, but we have a number of businesses that. were not funded, the first go around so this will allow us to help them and they were eligible and worthy so we're going to continue to work off our existing list. Another area, one and a half million dollars, is going to go toward our innovative nourishing neighborhoods program. So nourishing neighborhoods. was really established to provide food in our most at risk neighborhoods and it does so by utilizing locally grown produce, so we identified neighborhood and so with characteristics that. Lack of food, availability and or difficult availability, so those were targeted early on and we've been supporting those for a number of months now. Currently nourishing neighborhoods supports 15 locations and approximately 15 thousands of food every two weeks are delivered. The funding will be going to provide resources to local pantries and pop up food banks also and continue to. To partner with school districts, by providing non perishable items for their backpack program so nourishing neighborhoods been an important to. Put security program for us another area, one and a half million dollars would call towards emergency child-care for essential workers. And this program really contributes to so much candies recovery and economic development by allowing frontline workers to stay on their job by providing support for child-care services. Another two and a half million dollars will go to programs managed by human services, and these include funds to support seniors. Enhanced 211 services, community outreach services and motel vouchers for individuals experiencing homelessness so that's two and a half million dollars to that. program so across County we can do to work with our partners to address all the areas that COVID is affecting our families and their communities and their businesses so. we'll just keep going until the pandemic is behind us and thanks to the Council for their partnership so with that I'm handed over to Dr Spitters from the Snohomish Health District.

Dr. Chris Spitters: Okay, thank you, Executive Somers, and great to hear about that assistance come into the residents of the County so glad to hear that Thank you and. Good morning, everyone so I'm going to just have a few comments today first, starting with some case data, and then a little bit more about vaccines. Yesterday we published updated maps and our routine bi-weekly report, as well as the

new case rate of 71 per hundred thousand. For the two week period ending March 13 This morning we published our next mini report on schools, which also includes and expanded table with information on cases and child-care centers and in higher educational facilities. Now, while our bi weekly report for Snohomish County shows a slight 8% increase in cases among children ages zero to 14 years. The number of cases and child-care's in schools are still relatively low, with only four settings across all institutions, having two or more cases in the other 121 situations or settings where there is a case there's only one case and no spread has occurred. The total number of cases across schools and child-care's in February. and trends so far for March show lower numbers, then we experienced when cases were increasing and peaking back in November, through January. And this is occurring so we're seeing these lower numbers as more students are heading back into the classroom so again just to a good signal that. The parents, the students, the staff and the faculty are engaging in those prevention measures that have been shown here and elsewhere to. interrupt and limits spread of COVID in the school community so all of this is good news. Please keep up the prevention work that you're all doing you're preventing hospitalizations and deaths, while also buying time for us to roll out vaccination to everyone in the County ultimately who wants to get it. As a reminder, all of this data that I just mentioned, can be found online at our case count page and I'm just going to put that in the chat box. So then, moving ahead to vaccines, we continue to make progress, every day in the county through the mass vaccination sites and through our health care system. But unfortunately our allocation numbers are not keeping pace with our ambition and our capacity to administer the doses this week's allocation to the county for the week of. The 15th through the 22nd is about 15,000 doses give or take a few so thankfully we've seen a heavier waiting of first doses. With about 11,000 of the 15,000 total being first doses, we had seen when then seeing diminishing returns on people coming back for second doses, and so we're happy to see more allocation of first doses, so that we can get additional people that first dose. However, let's keep this 11,000 1st dose number in mind, as I share some information with you about eligibility expansions occurring. First, the recent expansion to include teachers school staff and childcare workers added approximately 30,000 eligible residents. Washington State Department of Health estimates that the next new group the one B two group becoming eligible tomorrow will add about 50,000 additional residents so 80,000 residents added to what was previously. The eligible population of older adults and people over 50 in multi-generational households when we add all those groups together we get about 300,000 people in Snohomish County. Who up through today were eligible for vaccine and our estimate is we're still working on that the numbers of doses administered through last week but. roughly we're thinking about 150,000 Snohomish County residents have received at least their first dose through last Saturday, so that leaves. Another hundred 50,000 eligible people vying for those 11,000 doses, this week, so you know that means you've got roughly a one in 15 chance of if you're if you go into find my face and you qualify. And you keep that confirmation and then you go to vaccine Finder or to the health district website and try to get a spot at one of the mass sites or one of the healthcare system sites, you know it's going to be about a one in 10 one and 15 chance this week. But with each successive week those chances will increase and, ultimately, we will get to everyone, so please continue to be patient don't give up keep trying and know that your time will come. I'd also like to share a little bit more about that phase one B to eligibility I mentioned earlier that's opening up tomorrow. This includes women ages 16 or older meaning they're eligible for the vaccine product and who are pregnant. As well as people who are 16 or older, who have a disability that puts them at higher risk. qualifying disabilities include but are not necessarily limited to

down syndrome other developmental disabilities, an intellectual disability hearing impairment blindness or low vision or people with both vision and hearing impairments, it also includes some high risk critical workers who work in certain sectors in congregate settings meaning they can't win their work doing their job they really can't do the physical distancing of six feet that we like to see for everyone, safety, this includes. People also who work with the public for at least three hours during a 24 hour day period, so the main sectors, these include our agriculture, fishing vessel crews, food processing, grocery store staff, correction staff, prisons, jails, or detention centers, courts, public transit and any remaining first responders who have not already been vaccinated. Workers in sectors that are not listed above are not eligible at this time, unless they meet eligibility criteria for phase one a. As a health care or long term care worker or long term care resident or one B one meaning age over 65 or eight over 50 and living in a multi generational household or working in a school or childcare. Additionally, workers in the industries, I did mention that are able to do their daily functions at a socially distant place you know they have an isolated office with no meetings or they work from home they would also not be yet eligible. Lastly, the vaccine Task Force shared the tentative schedule for the mass vaccination sites, this week, I just want to run over those briefly. First Angel of the Winds Arena is administering the Johnson and Johnson single dose vaccine using up our remaining supply during today through Thursday. Arlington was open over the weekend and yesterday but it's currently expected to be closed the rest of the week, since we don't have any Pfizer doses available to administer through that site. admin called Edmonds college site will have first dose Moderna available today, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday the Boeing Everett activity Center will also have first dose Moderna availability today through Friday. And the Monroe site will be doing both first and second doses of Moderna today through Saturday so with that I'll turn it back to you, Executive Somers.

Dave Somers: Thank you doctor and let's see do not have any questions yet so if you have any questions for us. I will go through them one, at a time any questions today. All right, so 300,000 people are eligible in Snohomish County right now how many people will be eligible starting tomorrow?

Dr. Chris Spitters: I might have convoluted things a little bit when I was explaining so. Tomorrow, when the gate opens for one day to that will include a number of people that if you look all the way back to the beginning, cumulatively from day zero through net through that day tomorrow when those gates open that's 300,000. of home about half mostly people who are in one day and one B one obviously have been gotten their first dose so that leaves 150,000 people who are. You know, in those work sectors, who meet the one B two criteria remaining people from one B one and then just a few stragglers from one who are eligible, but still haven't been vaccinated so roughly 150 eligible unvaccinated individuals. And 50,000 150,000. Thank you.

Dave Somers: Let's see- please clarify low vision as a criteria for the newly eligible.

Dr. Chris Spitters: Vision issues criteria yeah I'd have I think we'll have to look on the face Finder I would anyone who is happy, you know it's not just a correction deficiency, or if you've you know, had. cataract surgery, and things replaced, these are people with. I think, with functional blindness, but will you know

the term we use like. or, worse, but why don't we instead of me guessing will look that up and get that back to you.

Dave Somers: Okay, are the two variants seen in King County showing up here in as either one more dangerous than the original?

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, keep in mind that only about somewhere between three and 5% of positive PCR results get forwarded for this sequencing that detects these variants, this is a surveillance tool it's not a clinical tests that comes back on every patient. The state is using this and the federal government as well to get a general idea of where these are at so the you know the. absence of evidence of the presence of these strains in Snohomish County or you know have more accounts or of the be one 135 that's the other one I think you were referring to. You know absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, as we say they're probably in the County week, they just haven't surfaced through the surveillance yet. I think if you know if it's in King County it's just a question of time till if not already it's here, so the key things with these two are that they. appear to be transmitted more easily and could lead to more cases and. More hospitalizations deaths taking us back to where we just came from and don't want to return to, so it speaks to all of us. You know doubling down on those prevention efforts, even while the vaccine is flowing out, even if we have been vaccinated. The goal is to suppress transmission of these and other strains until we can get fully vaccinated in terms of severity the. there's you know it's it the full jury is kind of out still on the be 117, but there is a fair amount of data coming in that suggests that risk of death in the UK was increased among individuals with this string. I think that we want to see if that pans out over time, here and elsewhere as well, and then the be 111 351 the besides increased transmission that concern with that one is that in the test to it's a little bit more. Less neutralized less stopped by immunity from people who have had COVID or been vaccinated in in humans, the prevention of infection with vaccine. In communities, like in South Africa, where that strain is dominant it doesn't prevent all infections, the way it does where that strain is not. circulating so F of efficacy against catching coven in that setting is maybe 60% rather than, say 90%. In other settings where that strain is not circulating, but the efficacy and preventing severe disease hospitalization and death is still just as good as in other settings and with the other vaccines so. I think it just speaks to the fact that you know, ultimately, one of these could have a immunity and. And we want to get cases down get vaccine out and then you know, the next step down the road and life is probably going to be adjusting the vaccines in future years, as these variants emerge, so that we can match up better with them and block them from getting transmitted

Dave Somers: Getting the vaccine is still hard, as you mentioned that one in 15 chance, when do you think this will start to change?

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, there it's a supply and demand, so as the supply increases which we've been told, you know as the Johnson and Johnson production ramps up, that we should start saying increase supplies of that and then, if we see an additional. You know, one of the other vaccine products get emergency use authorization again we'll see more supply so that helps. And then, as we work our way through the population and people get vaccinated then demand will decrease so we've got you know, two

curves with supply hopefully going up and demand ultimately going down and the waiting game will become less frustrating for people as time moves ahead.

Dave Somers: Question about the state of testing in the County- are we seeing a decrease in testing for the virus, now that more folks are getting vaccinated?

Dr. Chris Spitters: So, yes testing demand has declined, both at County wide at the health district sites, The Everett Clinic also you know we see their specific data they share that with us and so across all settings. You know testing the man has declined I think we're down to roughly in the neighborhood of five to 6000 tests, a week, I think we were peaking more up around. I think it was 12 to 15,000 tests, a week when things were really moving positivity rates are declining but starting to plateau down around four or 5% County wide. So we think we have enough testing up to one reach those you know, through the public settings to the health district settings. To provide a safety net for those who can't access testing through the traditional health care system, also as a surveillance tool to detect any increases and then also as a sort of a reservoir of capacity from which we could expand if we saw another wave and an increase in demand.

Dave Somers: So for documentaries, you said, the County is seeing a diminishing return on people coming back for the second doses that mean that people aren't coming back for the second doses?

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, I suspect it yes there's I think there's two factors at play roughly. When last I heard you know we through the mass sites, we reach out because we have those folks emails and we send out reminders and we've gotten about 80-85% of those back, but the. The you know we've reached diminishing returns, as I said, we have a lot had a lot of second doses that we got no signups for last week and so. Demand for those remaining doses is low, and I suspect that it's one of two things either. The folks who got their first dose got the second dose in another County somewhere, and so we didn't you know really get it counted here and that's fine as long as they get their second dose and some people, probably like any you know any. It or have you know multiple step process in life, including those in health and medicine, not everyone takes it all the way and so we do the best we can. But then, once we do reach diminishing returns if someone's not coming back we're not going to persist too long and that we're going to move on to folks who the first shot will benefit and so that's what's going on now.

Dave Somers: Doctors say the vaccine distribution system was kind of fractured, but there's multiple paths for people to get vaccines that through the County, in health district system, pharmacies, medical establishment, et cetera so tracking exactly who's getting what where and how it all totals up as a little difficult centers.

Dr. Chris Spitters: Yes, it's extremely difficult, we have two people almost full time on that, right now, and so we you know we do the best we can, but it is it's harder to track individuals and their outcomes specifically than it is you know gross numbers of doses administer indeed.

Dave Somers: And how are we doing with the continued pressure on the State to increase proportional vaccine allocations?

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, you know we're if you look at us over time, cumulatively we're writing about our if you look at our I at. The age of the hub sorry, the number of people living in Snohomish County over age 16 that's the youngest age eligible for vaccination. we're getting about 10 to 11% of the doses cumulatively that have gone out from the state and that's. The proportion of the population over 16 that we are so I think you know where this is where we're at this. things might you know one week we might get a little more a little less depending on you know, a new group that comes in that might be in our County maybe a little bit smaller than the statewide average or a little bit larger. And that's you know that's pretty much how the state's trying to do it now is to keep it what they call pro rata so we get our share. Our population base share of the eligible population at that time, and so this is where we're at obviously we keep asking for and advocating for getting more, but you know, I think, the reality is there were at our per capita share.

Dave Somers: What role will vaccination passports play and allowing for travel or even just getting to the movies or restaurants or public places, what about people who are choosing not to be vaccinated is this discrimination. Oh you're muted. Thank you.

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, it certainly raises a you know a lot, there are some positive aspects to getting vaccinated and, in addition to protecting oneself there could be privileges afforded, on the other hand. You know there's some equity issues around if you just haven't been able to get vaccinated yet, but you'd like to now you're at a disadvantage with those other folks and then people who either due to. Their personal choices or do to occasionally due to medical conditions, particularly allergy who don't get vaccinated you know, there is some discrimination and they're. These matters, the police powers regarding you know, public health, our sit with the state on that sort of thing and we'll look to the. I think the Federal Government and the State to kind of start defining that sort of thing and then we would. You know, adapted here we can always be more strict but not less strict on the state on these types of things, but I have heard no plans in the works yet about any such regime in the US.

Dave Somers: Correct me if I go astray here, but for most of my life getting back to the nation's and having proof of those vaccinations it's been. kind of standard operating procedure when you're traveling internationally to many places, and now much so many years ago, but I would fully expect that. countries would have requirements vaccination requirements, I would not be surprised, noise, if we see that as a standard part of. international travel and probably more likely them restaurant or theater requiring such kind of vaccination proof, but certainly internationally that's probably in our future is that fair to say

Dr. Chris Spitters: Yes, I would agree, I think those are that international movements and employment are probably the two sectors where. You know the institution or what have you that we're engaged with might require us to be vaccinated to participate.

Dave Somers: Dr Spitters, can you talk more about what it means for the County to be remaining below 100 cases per hundred thousand- seems pretty remarkable and given the increase in testing access. Well, you know, I think it just speaks to everybody's continued efforts. and that's great news I would just say let's keep it up. The lower we can get this incidence the longer. You know leeway, we have to get vaccination out before the next wave might otherwise come so, all I can say is this is great news Thank you let's Keep it up and. You know, try to try to prevent another way. The other thing just collectively, the less infections that are out there. Here and abroad, the less the smaller the pool from which these concerning variance can arise, so not only are we protecting ourselves in the moment when we drive incidents down and have a low prevalence of cases but we're also protecting our future

Dave Somers: And just a stress point we've made before the number of tests doesn't really affect the rate that we see because you take the number of tests administered to see how many people have those had it and you calculate the rate so number cases per hundred thousand wasn't really significantly affected by having more or fewer tests your confidence that number is accurate goes up, but the number itself has been pretty standard, so we feel like we're in a really good place. let's see Can you clarify what you meant by diminishing returns for second doses, so are you saying, many people aren't coming back to get their second doses

Dr. Chris Spitters: No, not many a few it sounds like 15% or so not coming back and obviously we aim for 100% but you know let's not let perfection get in the way of doing good so we. You know, we made efforts to through our mass sites people that have gotten the first dose that you know made lots of efforts to reach out and there's this kind of crew that we don't hear back from probably some of them went and got a second dose somewhere else. But some of them, probably are ever elected not to come back, but we're not at some point you gotta you know give up the battle to win the war and we're going to move on. Now those folks can always get a second dose there's no you don't have to restart even if it's been more than six weeks, ideally, we want people to get that second dose that. four to six weeks, but if it doesn't happen, and they get it at eight that's Okay, so if you're out there, and you haven't had a second dose yet and you're up go get it it's not too late

Dave Somers: Next question are you you're eager to move on to phase three in the County and what are your thoughts on splitting up the regions and moving back to County focus to progress and phasing and I just want to say yes, we're extremely eager with some trepidation, we want to keep the case counts going down so we're asking everybody to continue to take protective measures that they have been they've been doing a good job of that so we don't want to see a bump up, but we know many businesses are hurting and families are hurting and it's just been a terrible. drain on the both the County and state in the world, frankly, but so we're anxious to move on. pushing the vaccines out as fast as we can, asking people to stay safe, it is not over it's not time to let up our guard but moving forward is very exciting from my standpoint, Dr.

Dr. Chris Spitters: You covered it it's great news it's great for schools kids the economy healthcare every everything and that comes with risks so we're you know I urge folks. let's take advantage of these newfound liberties, but do so wisely and with respect for this virus which has shown us several times that

it doesn't take. Too much time for it to research so keep up the prevention efforts but let's enjoy what we've earned you know

Dave Somers: And I didn't address the County by County aspect of this we advocated from day one to kind of maintain a County by County assessment when the state went to regions. saw some difficulties there. Nobody wanted to be held back by somebody else or hold somebody else back in a region so we're very glad we're going back to a County by County assessment. Think it's this really both the fairest and frankly every counties a little bit different terms of their culture and their status and just their community, so we think it makes a lot of sense. We're happy that we're back in and County by County mode. Is County considering bolstering security at angel wins, given that prep ma doesn't require folks to be eligible. We know it's an honor system, but people are getting appointments without having to lie about eligibility and some get through is an unreasonable to expect people will go through phase Finder first. No, not unreasonable at all, and that is our you know guidance and expectation, to the Community that you know step one is phase Finder. And step two is prep MOD step, you know determine eligibility get that confirmation then register for vaccination now there's some folks who can't. navigate the system to make that happen and our call Center has capacity to help those folks particularly but not exclusively, the elderly and folks needing language assistance. Having said that, you know we do employ common sense if someone comes through the vaccine site and they're obviously over 65 years of age. And they don't have their phase Finder we're not going to slow them down. If a 25 year old comes through without their Phase Finder, we will be routing them back to recheck their eligibility. The other thing to keep in mind is you know these are large systems large number of people going through. And harkening back to my earlier comment, while we want to be fair and just and distribute things in a prioritized fashion that benefits the Community most that treats individuals. You know, equal to equitably. You know if we you know get too focused on compliance, we can lose velocity and so I'm not promoting you know tolerance of the type of thing that you mentioned. But we can we can also get bogged down working too hard to try to suppress that, so we have to find that right Max but certainly it's expected that people go to face Finder before making their prep my appointment

Dave Somers: And we are asking people to arrive at the vaccination sites with some documentation that they are eligible. Dr Spitters, if you obviously don't fit one of the categories, it seems like you might you could be checked and you could be turned away so please do bring some documentation of eligibility. Every person has not checked, but some you know obvious cases where they don't seem to fit probably will be at any of our County run sites so just remember the phasing systems really been set up to make sure that the most vulnerable get treated ineligible first and so that's really for the health of the community that just respect the phases, and please come with some documentation. See the Department of Health is reporting more doses going to hospital systems in the last week or so- why do you think that is?

Dr. Chris Spitters: I can't tell you. Not the case in Snohomish County and I would direct you back to them to answer that.

Dave Somers: Yeah where the some doses some vaccines going directly from the Federal Government to some facilities, you know anything about that doctor that pharmacies?

Dr. Chris Spitters: Can you, excuse me, can you repeat that.

Dave Somers: Doses vaccine going directly to some facilities like pharmacies, not through the state system.

Dr. Chris Spitters: That's right there about 11,000 doses, this week, going to retail pharmacies in Snohomish County. For administration that's on top of the 15,000 doses allocated to the health district and health care system clinical providers, so the pharmacies have another 11,000 doses, so that brings the County total up to about 26,000 doses.

Dave Somers: However, the equity measures going in do you think vaccine hesitancy will naturally wane as more people get their shots will just say- we are continuing that work and it's primarily outreach to communities, make sure we're communicating about availability. And where vaccine might be available it we're still remain within the phase system so we're not. Going outside of the current phase system, but we are trying to communicate and target communities that we know how to access issues, so I don't know if you want to say more about that, doctor.

Dr. Chris Spitters: I said then you covered it's ongoing work, and you know we won't be through with that work until we're done with the whole vaccine effort it's part and parcel of the whole process trying to get. Be fair and also account for folks who have a harder time for a variety of reasons, get into the vaccine and that you know, includes the part B of that question was about you know people's interest and willingness to get vaccinated and concerns about safety and that sort of thing, and I think you know what the question implied is a reasonable thing as we get more and more experience and hundreds of thousands of people in the County and millions in the state. Get vaccinated and we don't see any concerning safety signals beyond what we already knew and I've shared with the community. I think that you know many people who may be around the fence about getting vaccinated Mike. might come down off the fence and get vaccinated we won't convince everyone, but I think we just want everyone who wants it to have access to it, we want everyone to have the information to make a good decision for themselves and their families

Dave Somers: And just emphasis on the equity managers, we are working with community leaders, and these are relationships we really grew during the census work a year or two ago so. Really, relying on people that various communities trust community leaders who is word is trusted to pass on information about vaccines and assure people that they're safe. And so, using those connections, where somebody might not trust what I say we're looking for people out there in the community, that people do trust so that's the emphasis of that work strong evidence. So with St Patrick's day this week, are we worried about another holiday spread.

Dr. Chris Spitters: Well, you know it's a good time for all people with Irish ancestry and those who. Like Irish culture to celebrate. You know the Irish heritage and our country. But I would discourage you know getting together in and gatherings of multiple households getting together and bars that sort of thing

because those are the kinds of. You know, not every gathering is going to be a problem, but one or more of them could become a super sporting event and then we do have a problem so just like any cause to get together, whether it's a. You know, a traditional holiday or a football game, or you know you name it, this is another area where you know, hopefully folks will kind of have the brakes on and do it wisely and small and simple rather than maybe our more traditional efforts on these days.

Dave Somers: I think we got to the bottom, and just note there's a definition low vision that's been put in the chat box.

Joint Information Center: This is Kristin in The Joint information Center. Thank you again for joining us today and for your questions. We're going to go ahead and wrap up please stay tuned for future media availabilities.