

## **Transcript for Joint Message from Snohomish County's Top Doctors January 7, 2022**

Nearly two years since COVID first arrived here, Snohomish County is experiencing historic levels of infection. We started the new year with an increasing case rate that is more than twice as high as our previous peaks during prior waves. We can expect to see increases continue in the weeks to come. A rapid rise in hospitalizations is also occurring at a pace exceeding statewide projections.

*Dr. Chris Spitters, Snohomish Health District*

The anticipated peak for reported cases and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 for February to mid-March will blow the lid off prior peaks and appears likely to exceed initial predictions. Both the healthcare and public health system are being overwhelmed.

*Dr. Joel Wasserman, Swedish Edmonds*

We're still learning about the Omicron variant, including its severity and its impact on vaccine acquired immunity. We expect more breakthrough infections among people who have not gotten a booster dose, as well as re-infections for people who are not vaccinated.

*Dr. Alka Atal-Barrio, The Everett Clinic*

You may have heard that Omicron causes milder illness. However, it is so contagious that it is already flooding our emergency departments, hospitals and the entire healthcare system. We vividly see the impacts in crowded emergency departments boarding dozens of acutely ill patients waiting for a needed hospital bed to become available. Virtually all other aspects of hospital and outpatient care are affected.

*Dr. Jay Cook, Providence Regional Medical Center Everett*

Surgeries for essential diagnosis and treatment are being cancelled. Empty beds in nursing homes sit vacant due to lack of staffing while patients eligible for discharge from the hospital pile up because no staffed nursing home beds are available. Non-urgent outpatient appointments are delayed or cancelled. There is not enough COVID testing available to keep up with the demand, and three-hour wait times in walk-in clinics have become the norm.

*Dr. Steve Campbell, Providence Medical Group*

This is not just about individual health, but the integrity of the healthcare system that provides care for all conditions. We continue to ask more of healthcare staff who have been working unbelievably hard over the last two years, but we fail to comprehend the precarious situation the system is in. They're tapped out and there is no reserve capacity. They need their community to step up and help relieve the burden.

*Dr. Tom Tocher, Community Health Center of Snohomish County*

Here's what we all can do. First, get vaccinated. Then get your booster dose done. Sign up for an appointment as soon as you can. You may need to book a couple of weeks in advance. Do it. After you're vaccinated, then stay cautious. Vaccination protects against severe disease and protects against death. But with cases surging, you can still get sick and potentially spread it to others.

*Dr. Mark Gunning, Western Washington Medical Group*

Mask up when you are outside of your home. Maximize the ventilation and airflow in settings where you are in indoor gatherings. When you're around people you don't live with, keep your mask always over your nose and mouth. And also consider higher quality masks like a KN-95

or layer a simple medical procedure mask with a cloth mask over the top. Don't pull your mask down to talk. That defeats the purpose of having the mask on.

*Dr. Connie Davis, Skagit Regional Health*

Stay home when not carrying out essential activities. Avoid unnecessary travel or gatherings. Stay out of crowds. If you gather, please keep it short with a small group in a well-ventilated area and wear your mask. If you are feeling ill, even a little bit – stay home. You don't need to go in for medical care if you have mild symptoms and you are in otherwise good health, but you should isolate at home, and seek testing.

*Dr. Patrick Gemperline, SeaMar Community Health Center*

Other respiratory infections like influenza are circulating now too. If you haven't yet gotten your influenza vaccine, make an appointment to do so as soon as possible. And if you do come down with the flu or a cold, it's still important that you stay home until you are well. Remember that your actions are crucial to keeping others healthy, too.

*Dr. Sean Kincaid, EvergreenHealth Monroe*

The next few months will likely be hard. *Dr. Wasserman*

Please be patient and ready for frequent updates. *Dr. Cook*

I know we're all tired. *Dr. Tocher*

We've been at this for two years. *Dr. Campbell*

Sadly, we are not done and we just can't let up. *Dr. Atal-Barrio*

We are asking the people of Snohomish County to rally together. And to get vaccinated and boosted. And protect ourselves. *Dr. Gunning*

To protect one another. *Dr. Spitters*

To preserve our healthcare system. *Dr. Davis*

We're resilient. We need you. *Dr. Gemperline*

We can do this. *Dr. Kincaid*