

## **Grant County Health District and Grant County Board of Health message to the community and visitors about the extremely infectious Delta variant and recent COVID-19 surge.**

The Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19 virus) has dramatically changed the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington state and in Grant County. Now, more than ever, the pandemic remains a race between an increasingly infectious and changing virus and administering the vaccines, which offer high levels of protection against severe disease. Research shows that the Delta variant is much more infectious. Those infected with it likely have a much higher amount of the virus in their respiratory tract than with the previous variants. This leads to many more viral particles being exhaled and aerosolized by people who have COVID. People are infected more quickly and get sicker faster than in the past.

**Our healthcare system, that we have all worked so hard to protect, is stretched and facing a possible collapse if the situation does not change rapidly.** Those who are unvaccinated are at high risk for hospitalizations. If there are many of them in a geographic area, it could stretch hospitals beyond their capacity to provide care. Regional hospitals that are needed for the highest level of critical care are running out of space and dealing with shortages of workers. Many facilities are postponing or cancelling non-emergent surgeries to free up staff and space for the sick. COVID-19 rates in Grant County are nearing 500 cases per 14 days. Larger outbreaks among unvaccinated people are being fueled by this highly contagious variant. Many have been needlessly infected. It is not known how long the current COVID wave will last, but it is likely to continue for some time.

**Vaccination offers excellent protection against severe COVID-19, but it is not 100% effective.** Some people, especially those individuals with weaker immune systems, may not respond to vaccinations fully and may still become infected with COVID-19. There is also increasing evidence that fully vaccinated individuals infected with the Delta variant could still spread the disease unknowingly.

**The good news is that those places in our country where vaccinations are high are seeing less COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.** If more people vaccinate, we jointly build a more effective barrier against the virus. This would help protect ourselves and our most vulnerable. Masking and physical distancing are still very important and offer another layer of protection against Delta and other variants when disease activity is rising. We acknowledge that many Grant County residents are choosing to not vaccinate. We ask that you consult with your healthcare provider to weigh your options.

**For all these reasons, the Grant County Health District and the Grant County Health Officer urgently recommend that:**

- 1. Every person 12 years of age and older get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible;**
- 2. For now, everyone, vaccinated or not, should continue masking in all INDOOR spaces;**
- 3. Everyone, vaccinated or not, should mask whenever in crowded situations OUTDOOR;**

4. Unless other changes are instituted in our state, **all entertainment facilities, both INDOOR OR OUTDOOR, especially large venues, concerts, rodeos, live music performances, gatherings, movie and other theaters, should:**
  - **screen guests for COVID exposure or symptoms** by either asking about it or, if screening is impractical, posting signage asking those who have COVID or COVID symptoms OR those exposed to COVID to not enter the venue, AND
  - **institute universal masking of staff and guests regardless of vaccination status,** AND
  - **provide for physical distancing of at least six (6) feet** between the individual groups in the audience, AND
  - **test any venue performers** prior to each performance with a rapid antigen test (performers in daily productions may be tested 2-3 times per week) and exclude any performers who test positive.
5. Everyone should **reconsider attending indoor or outdoor gatherings and avoid unnecessary travel, weighing their risks amidst this COVID surge;**
6. **Anyone with symptoms of COVID should seek testing immediately and isolate;**
7. **Anyone who recently attended a gathering or a venue, or anyone who recently traveled should get tested for COVID-19 in 3-5 days after attending or traveling and wear a mask in all settings for at least 14 days or until receiving a negative test result, possibly retesting again at 7-14 days.**

With the realization that the Delta variant and this COVID wave are very concerning but still temporary, we ask that you exercise caution and follow these recommendations until the wave subsides or until other recommendations are issued. Life with COVID-19 is possible. It is much safer with vaccinations, masking, and social distancing when aiming to protect ourselves, our hospitals, our healthcare workers and our communities during disease surges.

You can follow us for additional information on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or our website [www.granthealth.org](http://www.granthealth.org).

We are in this with you,

Your GCHD and Grant County Board of Health

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