

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 05/20/2020**

TO: Grant County healthcare providers, infection control staff, supervisory nursing staff, clinic management, school nurses.

Grant County Emergency Management

Grant County Media

**FOR INFORMATION CONTACT**

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### **Grant County Health District's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Grant County, WA – Yesterday Governor Jay Inslee announced criteria for some larger counties to apply for a variance to move to Phase 2 under the state's Safe Start recovery plan. Grant County was not included in the group of counties eligible to apply. The data matrix used was based on the infection rate over a 14 days of testing period and the CDC recommendation that a community needs to be below .71 cases per 100,000 people per day. In Grant County, this equates to less than 10 cases over a 14-day period. Below is the data shared with GCHD.

County	Average Daily Case Count	Population	Rate per 100,000
Grant	1.5	98,740	1.5

Mindful of the risks associated with COVID-19, Grant County Health District is committed to being prepared for Phase 2 as soon as that opportunity is made available. We are all anxious to see when the number of cases in our county drops below the rate necessary for a variance. But COVID-19 case rates are one part of the variance requirements. While we wait for the opportunity to apply, GCHD is also making sure that we have everything necessary in place to meet our state's expectations for a variance, including working on arrangements for an isolation and quarantine facility, increasing testing volume across the county, improving availability of testing sites, and even re-purposing technology to allow for the required daily check-in with close contacts. All those are necessary parts of any future application.

To that end, Grant County Health District is working closely with the Grant County healthcare community and neighboring health departments and districts to accomplish these tasks. Here is a snapshot of ongoing daily work by our staff:

- Investigating COVID-19 reports in Grant County, assuring that all individuals with positive COVID-19 results are appropriately isolated, identifying all people who have been in close contact with those individuals and placing them under quarantine/isolation within 24-48 hours of the initial notification. Since mid-March, GCHD's 21 employees have staggered days off in order to have 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

response and will be moving to a weekend on call schedule for the summer months. More than 3,700 contacts have been made since the onset of this emergency.

- Grant County Health District staff contacts every tested individual (reported by the healthcare facility tested at) to ensure isolation orders are understood and identify any possible epi-link to a positive case.
- Working with employers, churches and community organizations where positive cases or clusters may have been identified, to reduce the spread of the disease to others.
- Creating guidelines, standards and policies relevant to the testing and care of individuals suspected of having COVID-19.
- Staffing and coordinating a daily check in with Grant County healthcare providers and long-term care facilities and sharing updated guidance.
- Sharing information with local agencies, organizations, businesses, and community groups. A list of the key guidance documents and signage can be found here: <http://granthealth.org/resources-for-covid-19>
- Providing consultation and reviewing operation plans that protect the public and workforce from COVID-19.
- Providing daily updates to the public on our website and Facebook. A link to our COVID-19 Data Page and Daily Blog is here: <http://granthealth.org/updates-for-covid-19-in-grant-county>
- Creating informational materials and educational resources aimed at encouraging Grant County residents to take steps to protect their health and the health of their community.
- Coordinating a regional response whenever applicable with our partners in the Region 7 (Grant, Chelan-Douglas, Okanogan, and Kittitas Counties).
- Providing on-site visits and link to testing (if needed), at congregate settings, including nursing homes and farm housing units.
- Working with the agricultural community at the local and state levels in order to limit the spread of the disease among the farm workers.
- Fielding numerous inquiries from elected officials, media and other community partners related to this unprecedented public health emergency.

As GCHD leadership, Board of Health, and the County Commissioners review the application for variance materials, there is important work under way. GCHD will need the continued support and assistance from our healthcare, cities, and county leaders for the essential elements of the application to include:

- **Increasing COVID-19 testing.**  
The application needs to demonstrate not only that COVID-19 testing is available across the county and accessible to all, but it is being done at an increased rate. This increase in testing includes involving workplaces and healthcare facilities with COVID-19 cases and testing all hospital admissions and/or those undergoing elective surgeries. GCHD is also working with our healthcare partners to continue to create this workforce for COVID-19 testing.
  - **Reducing the number of days from illness onset to COVID-19 test specimen collection.**  
This means our community members should seek testing as soon as they suspect COVID-19 symptoms. It also means that all individuals exposed to someone with COVID (close contacts) are being advised to seek testing regardless of symptoms. As a result, testing sites and our healthcare facilities will need to test a larger number of people who now qualify for testing.
  - **Establishing available housing facilities for patients who cannot isolate or quarantine in their home safely.**
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Everyone who needs isolation or quarantine must do so safely without exposing others. That is not always possible due to crowded living conditions or no home. GCHD and partners have identified motel rooms and possibly a closed nursing home facility for this purpose. Part of this plan also includes the Moses Lake's homeless camp plan.

- **Assuring essential needs for those recovering, or those in isolation or quarantine.**

For those recovering at home, our community must demonstrate the services available, including food and other support services outlined by the state.

- **Maintaining staff capacity.**

The application must demonstrate that there is staff capacity within our community to continue carrying our investigative work, while at the same time having the capacity to perform thorough outbreak investigations in congregate living facilities and workplaces. All those in close contacts with COVID-19 need to be found and tested. All individuals who are isolated or quarantined need to be contacted daily. In addition, we are working with a software company on implementing a confidential electronic (including texting) communication platform to allow for a daily contact with those under public health monitoring.

There was no playbook written for COVID-19, but we have utilized our expertise and community partnerships developed over the years from other public health emergencies and outbreaks during our usual work. Still, we need partners, supportive community leaders and a supportive community to be successful. We understand that you may not be fully aware of what we do or what our role is at this time. We are a small, but dedicated workforce of people who live in Grant County just like you and who have responded to work on preventing a bad outcome and on getting us ready for the next phase of the "Safe Start Washington".

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