

DIRECTIVE TO USE FACE COVERINGS AIMS TO STOP COVID-19 RESURGENCE

May 28, 2020

To the editor:

Last Saturday, Grant County received permission from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) to move to Phase 2 of the Governor's "Safe Start Washington" plan. In my recommendation to the Grant County Board of Health to apply for that variance, I signaled my intent to direct all county residents and visitors to use face coverings indoor where 6 feet of separation cannot be maintained. The main reason was that in Phase 2 and beyond the contacts between people increase. Yesterday, I issued the face covering directive.

My directive is similar to directives in other Washington counties. It is an extension of my recommendations for covering face in public from February and March. The new directive does not seek to punish anyone. I hope to simply increase the use face coverings indoor when we cannot stay more than 6 feet apart. Wearing a fabric mask or a covering traps our droplets when we speak, cough, or sneeze. This has been shown to keep COVID-19 from spreading if we all do it. Yes, it can be a nuisance. True, it can be annoying. It feels like you are being told what to do, even though many have already followed this advice. Still, the directive is necessary to support our effort of increasing masking in our stores, in farm housing, in food processing plants and in retail overall--all areas of high spread.

Recent developments show that using face coverings is more important than ever. During the last two weeks, the pace of COVID-19 in Grant County has increased: a 14-day period from 5/14 until today showed 19 new cases in various settings. This is a double of what we saw during a two-week period ending on 5/18. The disease has recently grown in Quincy and Mattawa, but now also in Moses Lake. We are dealing with our first daycare outbreak. Even though there were no new deaths or hospitalizations, more cases could lead to it.

Phase 2 variance is good news for Grant County. It was based on having no more than 10 new cases of COVID-19 over a 14-day period, a requirement by the DOH. Supporting that effort are thousands of work hours being invested by your Grant County Health District staff to isolate those who are ill and to quarantine their contacts. All this with increased testing and your cooperation is necessary



to keep the virus boxed-in. We are joined in this fight by your hospitals, clinics, law enforcement, elected officials, but also by bands of community volunteers performing simple acts of kindness.

To get to Phase 3, our numbers need to remain low. Increasing the use of face coverings is one of the remaining interventions we have at our disposal when the human-to-human interactions are increasing. We do not need to look very far for what an uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 could look like here. Our friends in Yakima County, with only about 2.5 times more people than Grant, are seeing around 100 cases per day and have already recorded nearly 100 deaths since the beginning of this pandemic.

I ask all of you to think really hard about this: why would not wearing a mask be a good decision right when the counties to the west are seeing a rise in cases?

All of us have sacrificed something to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Many have lost jobs, our kids have suffered, our elders are sheltering in place, and our economy is hit. But especially now is not the time to let up. Physical distancing of more than 6 feet should be integrated into our lives as much as possible in the foreseeable future. Using face coverings and washing our hands seem like a no-brainer. An increasing trend in cases could mean that our “reopening” could be rolled back again.

So please allow me this opportunity to once more ask you and urge you strongly to use face coverings together with physical distancing in Grant County and beyond. Using a face covering shows that we care about each other and about human lives in general—a simple act of citizenry during these trying times. I expect more counties, if not our state, enacting similar directives soon. The way I look at it, we have little to lose by wearing a face covering.

I wish to thank you all for your patience and sacrifice, for your acts of kindness, words of support, and your willful cooperation in this fight as we continue to kick the strength out of this virus together, no matter any disagreements.

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Grant County Health Officer

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