Kitsap Public Health COVID-19 Case Reporting FAQ

How does Kitsap Public Health investigate COVID-19 cases?

Our team investigates every laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case reported for a Kitsap County resident. Here is a summary of the investigation process:

- **A health care provider or laboratory reports a positive case** to Kitsap Public Health.

- **We initiate an investigation.** A trained public health employee interviews the positive case. The positive case identifies who they were in close contact with during the time they were infectious. Close contacts are the people most at risk for becoming infected from the case.

  ◊ *The CDC defines a close contact as someone who was within approximately 6 feet of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time (10 minutes or longer) or had direct contact with infectious secretions from a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on).*

- **Our team works as quickly as possible to notify close contacts** and provide them with guidance. We only notify close contacts who live in Kitsap County and had contact with the confirmed case within the past 14 days. If a close contact lives in another county, we notify that county's health department.

- **Close contacts are told to stay home for 14 days** after their last exposure to the case and monitor their health. We recommend close contacts who are at higher risk for serious illness contact their health care provider for guidance.

- **If a close contact develops symptoms**, we recommend they contact their health care provider. If the person is tested and tests positive for COVID-19, a new investigation is initiated.

What information does Kitsap Public Health release to the public?

We release the following information for each new positive COVID-19 case reported in the county:

- **Decade of age** (e.g. 20s, 40s, 60s)

- **The area of the county where the person lives** (Bainbridge Island, Bremerton area, Central Kitsap, North Kitsap, South Kitsap).

As more cases are reported in Kitsap, we will release additional information in aggregate.

How do I know if COVID-19 is in my neighborhood?

COVID-19 is spreading across Kitsap County. Multiple positive cases have been reported in every area of Kitsap (Bainbridge Island, Bremerton, Central Kitsap, North Kitsap, and South Kitsap).

Not everyone who has COVID-19 will be tested. This means Kitsap Public Health is not aware of every COVID-19 case in Kitsap. The positive cases we are able to report likely provide an incomplete picture of the spread of the illness in our county.

All Kitsap residents should assume COVID-19 is spreading in their community and take steps to protect their health. This includes staying home whenever possible, staying at least six feet away from other people, and practicing healthy habits like handwashing to prevent getting and spreading COVID-19.

Why don't you release more details about COVID-19 cases?

We understand there is a huge amount of interest and concern regarding COVID-19 cases in our community.

As a public health agency, **we are prohibited by federal law (HIPAA) from divulging private health information** of individuals or releasing information that could be used to link personal health information to an individual.

We take this requirement very seriously. We also know that in a community the size of Kitsap County, even a small amount of detail can be used to connect a specific person to a reported health condition.

As part of our COVID-19 case investigations, we interview the person who tested positive for the infection to identify people they have been in close contact with. We then work as quickly as possible to notify those close contacts, as allowed by HIPAA.

In the event that we are unable to identify or notify everyone who was in close contact with a case and public notification is needed to ensure those at risk are informed of their risk, we will release limited additional details needed to protect the public's health, as allowed by HIPAA.

Is there a delay in notifying close contacts and reporting cases?

COVID-19 tests are ordered by health care providers and completed by laboratories. When a COVID-19 test comes back positive, it is the health care provider's responsibility to notify the patient of the result. The health care provider is also required to notify public health. The laboratory enters the result into a statewide database.

Kitsap Public Health does not initiate an investigation into a positive case until:

- We have been notified of the positive test by a provider or through the state database.
- The patient has been notified of the test result by their health care provider.

Once these two steps have occured, we will interview the patient and begin notifying close contacts. This process can take hours or even days. Because this delay exists, the person who tested positive for COVID-19 may alert people around them before Kitsap Public Health has begun notifying contacts.

What should an employer do if an employee reports having COVID-19?

Under HIPAA, Kitsap Public Health cannot confirm to an employer that a specific employee has tested positive for COVID-19.

If an employee self-reports a positive COVID-19 test, the employer should assume the employee has COVID-19 and instruct the employee to stay home.

Per CDC and Department of Health Guidance, people with confirmed COVID-19 should isolate at home until at least 3 days after their fever is gone and their symptoms improve, AND 7 days have passed since their symptoms started.

For more information, go to the COVID-19 page at KitsapPublicHealth.org and follow the "What to do if: You have confirmed or suspected COVID-19" link.

Thank you for doing your part to keep our community healthy!