Oct. 9, 2020

LETTER TO THE KITSAP HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY:
WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE COVID-19 TESTING

Dear Kitsap Healthcare Partners,

The past seven months have been profoundly challenging for our profession and our community. Throughout this pandemic, Kitsap residents have been fortunate to be served by dedicated, top-quality healthcare professionals. I am personally grateful for your support of our mission to protect the health of community members under these especially daunting circumstances.

COVID-19 testing is a critical component of beating this virus, and we need your help to get it done and get it done fast. The sooner we identify positive cases, the sooner we can get people into isolation so they don't infect others.

Kitsap has consistently lagged behind neighboring counties in access to testing and the overall volume of tests administered. Recently, Kitsap Public Health has received many concerning reports of people who should be tested for COVID-19 being turned away by their providers. Limiting access to COVID-19 testing undermines our ability to diagnose and investigate cases in a timely manner, notify close contacts, and further prevent the spread of the virus.

As health officer, I need to ensure Kitsap healthcare providers are knowledgeable of COVID-19 testing guidance from the [Washington State Department of Health](#) and [CDC](#), and are providing testing to patients in the following groups:

1. Those with COVID-19 symptoms ([per CDC](#)), regardless of severity.
2. Close contacts of confirmed cases (testing ideally done at 5-8 days post contact).
3. Members of ethnic and racial groups [disproportionately impacted by COVID-19](#) who desire testing.
4. Those with recent attendance at high-risk events (more than 10 people in a high transmission zone without universal masking or physical distancing).

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5. Those who recently traveled to [areas with a high prevalence of COVID-19.](#)
6. Healthcare workers, critical infrastructure workers, and first responders who desire testing.
7. Those with any association with a COVID-19 outbreak.
8. Those who live, work, or receive care in a long-term care setting.
9. Any others advised to pursue testing through the Kitsap Public Health District.

If you have any questions about these criteria, you can reach out to me or our communicable disease staff at 360-728-2235.

Kitsap Public Health is doing its part to create additional options for low-barrier COVID-19 testing in our county. Our staff are working closely with the Kitsap County Emergency Operations Center to establish a community testing program that will provide testing to people in the priority groups listed above. No provider visit will be required. Insurance will be billed for those who are covered, and a federal grant program will cover the cost for those without insurance. We expect to have the first testing site launched in mid-October.

Through our combined efforts, we can broaden access to COVID-19 testing for Kitsap residents, respond rapidly to cases, and prevent additional illness and deaths.

I welcome your feedback and questions. Thank you for your service to our community.

Sincerely,

Gib Morrow, MD, MPH

Health Officer

Kitsap Public Health District