



## MASON COUNTY COMMUNITY SERVICES

Building, Planning, Environmental Health, Community Health

*From the Office of The Mason County Health Officer  
Daniel Stein, M.D.*

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August 12, 2020

Dear Mason County School Superintendents:

First, I wanted to extend my gratitude to the education leadership for all the hard work that has been done in order to ensure the safety of our county's children. Unfortunately, currently Mason County has started to see a drastic increase in new cases. Over the past 3 weeks, the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our county have almost tripled the total that we had over the previous 5 months. The age of the confirmed COVID-19 cases in our community has also been trending towards younger individuals. Multiple studies have recently been published indicating the impact of schools in the spread of COVID-19. The reduction in the spread of the virus can lead to a significantly reduced incidence of death throughout the community.

The Washington State Department of Health has provided guidance for reopening schools. This decision tree stratifies areas into low, moderate and high COVID-19 activity levels. The State considers any area with more than 75 cases per 100,000 individuals in a 14-day time period, an increasing trend in cases and a test positivity rate of more than 5% as high activity locations. In calculating our values, Mason County is currently at 169 new cases per 100,000 residents in the last 14 days, there is an increasing case rate and we have a more than 10% positivity rate over the past 10 days. These values clearly place Mason County into the high-risk category. The guidance from the State in this situation would be to "strongly recommend distance learning with the option for limiting in-person learning in small groups... for the highest need students..." This guidance continues that high-risk communities should "strongly recommend cancelling or postponing all in person extracurricular activities, including sports, performances, clubs, events, etc." Based on the activity level of COVID-19 in Mason County, along with the guidance from the State, I am recommending that all public and private K-12 education centers open only to distance learning options. Exceptions to this guidance would be to consider limited in-person education for those students who are unable to fully utilize distance learning options.

School administrators remain ultimately responsible for establishing the education services appropriate for their students. Cooperation and coordination with the local health department is essential to preserve the health and wellness of our county's youth. I recognize that changing our previous education strategy may have many unintended consequences for individuals and family members. I commit to frequently reassessing the state of COVID-19 in our community and will recommend opening to further in-person education as soon as it is safe to do so.



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In order to safely open, we must start to see a reduction in the community spread of this virus. It is the responsibility of everyone in our community to work on the mitigation strategies that we had previously laid out. I want to again emphasize the importance of maintaining social distancing, masking while in public, staying away from others when you are ill, and getting tested if you are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms. This is an unprecedented time. We must all come together to reduce the spread of this virus to protect our children and our community.

Sincerely,

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Daniel Stein, M.D., Mason County Health Officer