



PRESS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dr. Leibrand releases statement on Safe Start-Reopening Washington Plan

Today, Skagit Public Health Officer Dr. Leibrand released the following statement on progress in the Safe Start – Reopening Washington Plan.

“Case counts are trending downward in Skagit County, and a few days last week, Skagit was actually briefly meeting all five metrics required to move forward to Phase 3 of the Safe Start -- Reopening Washington plan. However, on July 2, Governor Inslee paused all forward progress in the Safe Start plan, and has not reversed that decision. **I support Governor Inslee’s continued pause on the Safe Start --- Reopening Washington plan** and encourage Public Health and the Skagit County Board of Health to support the Governor’s continued efforts to slow COVID-19 transmission statewide.

COVID-19 transmission in Skagit County has reduced because the restrictions and guidelines put in place work. Skagitians’ continued diligence in following guidelines such as washing hands, wearing facemasks, staying socially distant and gathering safe and small continues to be important in the fight against COVID-19. Lessening the related restrictions now, when we are just barely hovering around the case goal, would be a mistake.

Further, although Skagit’s data is fluctuating near the 25 cases per 100,000 threshold, much of the region is not. Both Whatcom and Snohomish County are seeing spikes in cases. Skagit County is not an island, and disease circulation in neighboring communities is concerning, especially when we think about the nearly 25 percent of Skagit residents who report working outside the County, according to the Washington State Employment Security Department.

Earlier this year I supported an effort by Skagit Public Health, the Skagit Board of Health and other community collaborators to ask the Governor to allow us to move forward in the

Safe Start plan before our data met the requirements. I did so then because I was confident that we could move forward and keep our community safe. This was in part because at the time, the threshold set by the Governor was ten cases per 100,000 residents over fourteen days, rather than 25. This threshold was too low, and ignored the very real reality that intra-household transmission being nearly impossible to prevent. When we pushed the Governor to move forward, our cases were below 25 per 100,000 over 14 days.

Unlike then, right now, I am not sure we can lessen restrictions safely. When we have seen consistently stable or declining rates below 25 cases per 100,000 over fourteen days and are consistently meeting all four other metrics we can think about lessening restrictions. But for now, I ask the community to continue to stay home, stay strong and stay healthy.”

Dr. Leibrand has served as Skagit Public Health Officer since 1989.

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