

July 15, 2020



## 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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Dear Mason County residents,

I am writing today as we press ahead in our response to this unprecedented pandemic. It has been over 170 days since the first individual was diagnosed in Washington State, and we continue to work tirelessly, every day, on preventing further infections and deaths. We have seen 72 cases and 1 death in Mason County at the time I am writing this letter. We are continuing to closely monitor the situation daily. I hope that we can have a better handle on this virus before onset of the respiratory virus season. Reducing community spread of this coronavirus is essential prior to resuming our normal daily activities, which includes allowing our children to go back to school in the fall.

Our priorities have not changed. We aim to minimize the risk of disease and improve the health and safety of our population. We are responding in real time to a brand-new virus. Many find it frustrating that guidance changes frequently and I share that sentiment. However, as we learn more about this outbreak, we need to be adaptable in our response.

One recent example of changing guidance comes in regard to face coverings. Keep in mind, there is no single intervention that will prevent 100% of infections. Anytime there is interaction between people, there is a risk. However, we are now learning that one of the most effective interventions for reducing the risk of broad spread of this contagion is community-wide use of facial coverings. I recognize that this has become a very polarizing issue, but our county strives to focus on decision-making based on data, and that data shows that when people wear face masks rates of infection decrease. In order to allow for our economy to open further, wearing facial coverings while in public must become part of our civic duty. To protect our neighbors, family, and friends from this invisible enemy, everyone must play their role. I have faith that we can prevent further restrictions of business and social interactions using this tool. Also, I want to remind people that face coverings should be worn in addition--not instead of--maintaining social distancing.

I would also like to discuss the importance of complying with recommendations for quarantine and isolation. We have achieved success in increasing the rate of testing which also means that we are able to identify more individuals who have been infected with the virus. With this, we also have more people aware of their contact with someone who has been infected. The knowledge of the individuals who are infected or who have been in close contact with those infected is an important tool to reduce transmission.

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However, this is only helpful if those who we have tirelessly worked to contact are compliant with the guidance to prevent others from being infected. If you believe that you have symptoms of the virus, please isolate yourself from everyone else, contact your provider, and get tested.

Lastly, on a personal note, I wanted to make sure that the community was aware of my own plans. I arrived in the area 8 years ago and quickly fell in love with the South Sound. I completed my medical training, established my early practice, and was given the extraordinary opportunity to serve Mason County as your local health officer. Shortly after I started my tenure in this position, our day-to-day activity was suddenly impacted by our response to the global pandemic. It has been a turbulent time, but incredibly meaningful to me to have this opportunity to work with others to support my community during a period of need. I believe that our health department has worked efficiently and effectively as a team in the effort to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, after discussions with my family, I have come to the difficult decision to relocate back to my home state of Minnesota. It causes me a very heavy heart to leave this area, but I am also excited to be closer to my loved ones. I want to ensure a seamless transition and allow the board of health adequate time to find a replacement. I will be remaining in my current role until the end of the year. My goal for my remaining time as your public health officer is to make sure that all of the programs that I have initiated will be sustainable and thrive long after my departure.

It has been an enormous honor to serve Mason County in its time of need.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Stein".

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