

Cowlitz County COVID-19 school data Updated 10/12/20

This report provides information that Cowlitz County residents and school superintendents can use to understand COVID-19 activity in our community as it relates to reopening schools. The longer, more complete COVID-19 data report is still published, now every other Wednesday or Thursday. The most recent COVID-19 data report can be accessed [here](#).

Feedback about this report helps us understand the public's interests, questions, and concerns around this issue. If you have feedback, please email us at Askcowlitzhealth@co.cowlitz.wa.us. We review all emails and often incorporate feedback into our work – these reports have evolved over time, many times in response to what we've heard from the public.

CCHHS current recommendation on school reopening

With Cowlitz County's return to the moderate activity level after a recent spike in cases, CCHHS recommends school districts continue to approach in-person learning with caution. Our current recommendation considers that some school districts postponed in-person learning until we knew the extent of our spike in cases after the Labor Day holiday even though rates had been in the moderate range more than three weeks in September.

- **For school districts currently in all-remote learning** Because the spike in cases was short-lived, these school districts can plan a return to in-person learning for elementary students, as described by the [DOH Decision Tree](#).
- **For school districts that have begun in-person learning** These districts can begin planning to expand to more grade levels (middle and high school students), but we recommend waiting to expand until 3 weeks of moderate activity has been sustained.

If case rates accelerate after expansion, or if rates enter and remain in the high range for more than 3 weeks, we will recommend that all school districts return to remote learning.

Most recent data

- Cowlitz County is currently in the **MODERATE** level of COVID-19 activity, at **44** cases/100,000 population/14 days from 9/23 – 10/6.
- Between 9/22 - 9/28, the most recent complete week of data available from the state, **3.5%** of Cowlitz County COVID-19 tests came back positive. This is **below** the level at which the state recommends caution for school reopening.
- Cowlitz County was within or below the moderate level of COVID-19 activity for 7½ weeks (7/17 – 7/30 through 9/7 – 9/20), in or below the high level for a week and a half (9/8 – 9/21 through 9/18 - 10/1), and has been in the moderate level for 5 days (9/19 – 10/2 through 9/23 – 10/6).
- **Good news: Case rates and percent positivity are back down**
We've returned to the moderate range and our percent positivity is back below 5%.
- **Past week: Case counts appear to have leveled out**
Looking at weekly data as opposed to two-week time periods (data not shown), our case count appears to have leveled off in the past week.

School reopening recommendation considerations

The Washington State Department of Health's [Decision Tree](#) provides guidance to communities when making decisions about in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this document includes some objective metrics, it also provides room for schools and health departments to implement the guidelines in a way that best serves their students and communities.

CCHHS generally bases our recommendations on DOH's Decision Tree. We also add a time parameter – we will generally support expanding in-person learning when COVID-19 activity has remained in the moderate or low range for 3 consecutive weeks.

After each expansion:

- If rates remain in the moderate range for three consecutive weeks, we support expanding in-person learning to additional groups of students.
- If rates increase and remain in the high range for more than 3 weeks, we will recommend that all students return to remote learning.
- If rates spike into the high range but return to moderate within 3 weeks, we recommend maintaining students' current learning modality; in-person students will remain in-person, while remote students will remain remote.

We use this 3-week delay in changes to control disease transmission while preventing schools from switching rapidly between in-person and remote learning, which would be challenging for schools, children, and their families to manage. Our recommendation may also consider other factors, such as when we waited until 2 weeks after Labor Day to decide on a recommendation for in-person learning even though we had been in the moderate range for more than 3 weeks, or when our percent positivity exceeds 5%.

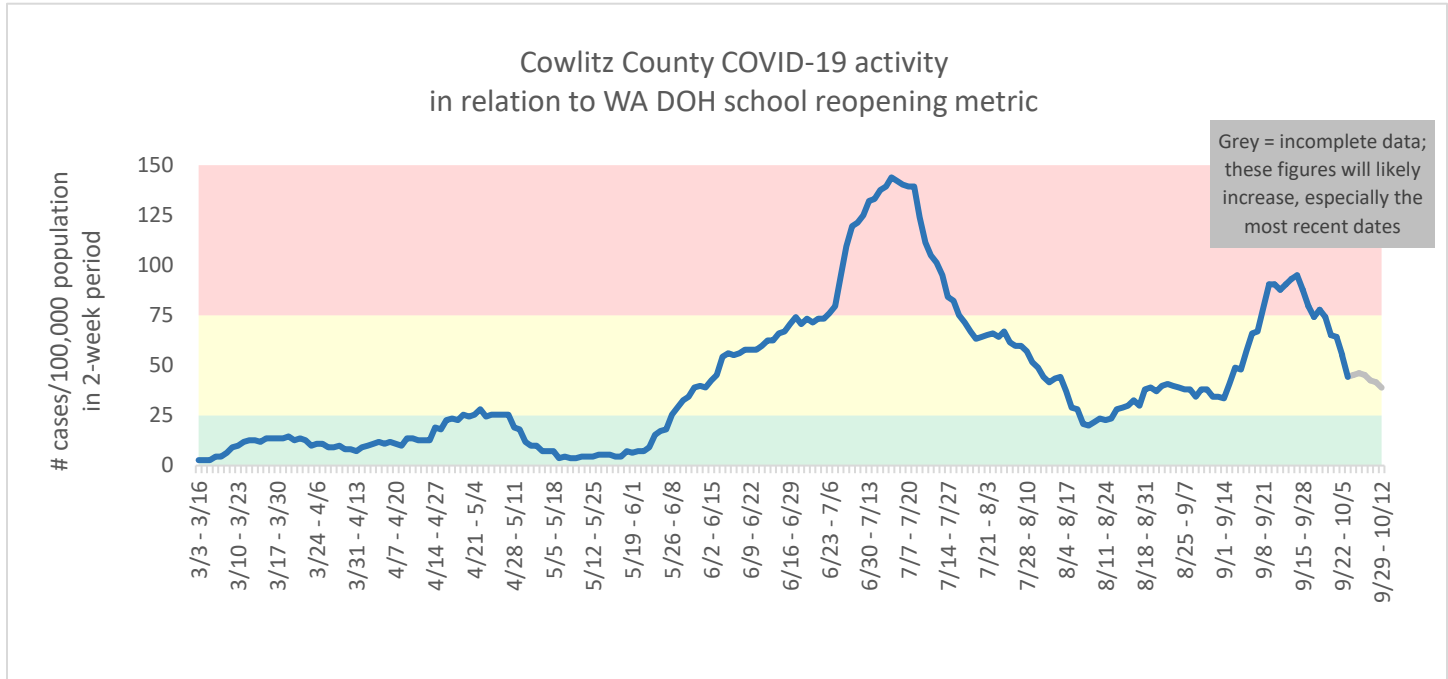
We acknowledge the difficult balance of weighing the risk of COVID-19 infections in schools with the needs of children and families that in-person school helps address. Our recommendations take into account the needs of the community as a whole. In addition, we encourage parents to make decisions that best suit their children and family. To support these decisions, we encourage local school districts to provide families with the option of keeping their children in remote learning even when in-person learning is provided. We also acknowledge that each school district has different circumstances and will continue to work closely with school districts to provide individualized guidance as local circumstances warrant.

School reopening data time trend

These data illustrate how COVID-19 activity in our community compares to the metrics identified by the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Health for use in deciding when and how to reopen schools.

The calculation for Cowlitz County's most recent rate is:

$$(49 \text{ total cases between } 9/23 \text{ and } 10/6) / (110,500 \text{ population}) * (100,000 \text{ multiplier}) = \mathbf{44 \text{ cases}/100,000 \text{ population}/2 \text{ weeks}}$$



Note on incomplete data

Data in this graph are based on the date when the test was performed and include all cases reported to CCHS by 8:30am on the date of this report. Cases are typically reported to CCHHS one or more days after the date of the test; the vast majority of positive test results are reported to CCHHS within six days of the test date. To account for this lag in reporting, the date range ending in the sixth day before the date of this report is considered the most recent complete figure. More recent data points are considered incomplete and are color-coded grey. Figures in grey will likely increase in future reports once all tests performed on these dates have been reported to CCHHS.

High COVID-19 activity: DOH recommends distance learning with the option for limited in-person learning who need it most – such as children with disabilities. Sports and extracurricular activities should remain on pause.

Moderate COVID-19 activity: DOH recommends distance learning as described above, with gradual expansion of in-person education, beginning with elementary students. Younger students under the age of 10 benefit the most from in-person learning while also posing less risk for transmitting COVID-19 than older students. Most sports and extracurricular activities should remain on pause.

Low COVID-19 activity: DOH recommends full-time in-person learning for all elementary students and hybrid learning for middle and high school, eventually moving to in-person for middle and high school.

Cases by specimen collection date

The table below displays the number of COVID-19 cases by specimen collection date. These data have been used to construct the school metrics graph. The specimen for the first COVID-19 case in Cowlitz County was collected on 3/11/20.

	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
1		1	1	1	7	0	2	8		
2		0	3	1	7	2	1	9		
3		1	0	1	4	11	5	2		
4		1	2	2	6	10	3	1		
5		0	4	7	3	4	2	3		
6		2	0	3	11	10	1	3		
7		2	1	1	9	3	0	3*		
8		0	0	8	23	1	2	3*		
9		0	0	5	21	0	2	4*		
10		1	0	4	16	2	5	1*		
11	1	0	0	2	7	1	2	1*		
12	0	0	0	5	7	1	1			
13	1	0	0	1	17	0	0			
14	0	2	0	2	9	1	11			
15	0	2	1	5	12	2	10			
16	1	1	0	4	9	3	10			
17	0	2	0	11	9	3	4			
18	0	0	2	4	4	1	13			
19	2	1	0	6	1	3	12			
20	0	1	1	4	10	2	2			
21	2	1	0	3	9	2	13			
22	3	4	0	8	6	3	15			
23	1	0	1	5	7	2	2			
24	2	0	0	6	9	1	2			
25	2	0	0	5	3	2	5			
26	0	0	1	5	0	6	4			
27	0	7	0	5	5	1	2			
28	2	1	0	3	7	2	3			
29	0	7	0	9	4	5	1			
30	1	2	0	8	5	0	4			
31	0		3		4	12				

*Due to lags in reporting, data from the prior five days are considered incomplete and the current day is not reported. This table excludes cases with missing data for specimen collection date. One (1) case is currently missing a specimen collection date.

Helpful links & community context to understand school reopening

For community members tracking the daily number of cases reported by CCHHS

If Cowlitz County has fewer than about 2 cases per day, we will be in the LOW range for school reopening. Cowlitz County will be in the MODERATE range if we have between 2 and just under 6 cases per day, and the HIGH range if we identify 6 or more cases per day. Please note that the school metric is based on test date, while case counts are updated as they are reported to CCHHS, so daily-reported counts will not line up exactly.

WA DOH school reopening guidance

School reopening plans will vary by district. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) have developed [guidance](#) for local health officials and school superintendents around health and safety recommendations. In addition, DOH has produced a [Decision Tree](#) to aid communities in reopening schools. The last page of the Decision Tree document includes an organized diagram outlining the factors and metrics to consider during this process.

The Decision Tree also recommends considering the percent positivity rate for tests. DOH recommends caution if this figure is above 5%.

Indicator definitions

Percent positivity rate

This indicator is the number of positive test results received, divided by the total number of tests performed, each week. It is based on the specimen collection date. Note that these data include multiple negative test results for one individual, other than those performed on the same day, while all positive test results after an individual's first positive result are excluded.

Data source: Test data obtained from the WA DOH [COVID-19 risk assessment dashboard](#), under "Testing Capacity". Data are typically accessed on the date of this report. Population denominator obtained from Washington State Office of Financial Management [Population Estimates for 2020](#).

School reopening

This indicator can be used to understand how COVID-19 activity in Cowlitz County compares to the metrics outlined in the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) and DOH's Decision Tree for reopening schools. It is a population rate as opposed to a count. The numerator is the total number of cases over a two-week time period, based on the specimen collection date. The denominator is the April 1, 2020 Cowlitz County population estimate provided by the Washington State Office of Financial Management. Our last step is multiplying this figure by 100,000 to give us a rate per 100,000. Because of reporting lags, the last 6 days of data are considered incomplete. The reported figure is for the two-week time period ending on the 6th day prior to this report date. DOH COVID-19 activity level groups are color-coded for reference.

Data sources: CCHHS case log, including cases reported to CCHHS as of 8:30am on the "Updated" date on the first page of this report. Population denominator obtained from Washington State Office of Financial Management [Population Estimates for 2020](#).