

7/21 UPDATES –

- We will provide a more in-depth look at COVID-19 case and vaccination data at the next Board of Health meeting at 10am on Tuesday, July 27. The public can watch the meeting live on [KLTV's website](#). Past presentations and meetings are [archived here](#).

This report is published every other Wednesday to provide a narrative of current COVID-19 trends, data not available elsewhere online, and a more in-depth analysis in our “Spotlight” section on a COVID-19-related topic of interest. This report references data obtained from the Washington State Department of Health’s COVID-19 [Data Dashboard](#) and [Risk Assessment Dashboard](#), as well as more detailed in-house analysis of case, hospitalization, death, and other COVID-related data.

Data on case incidence, hospitalizations, percent positivity, and ICU occupancy are no longer provided in table format in this report, but can still be found on the state DOH’s [Data Dashboard](#) and [Risk Assessment Dashboard](#).

Do you have a question or comment about this report, or a suggestion for what to include in a future Spotlight section? Please email us at Askcowlitzhealth@co.cowlitz.wa.us.

Current COVID-19 trends in Cowlitz County

Cases appear to continue a slow decline; per capita new deaths are trending above the state average and have leveled off since February

We saw an average of 8 new confirmed and probable cases per day from specimens collected July 5-11. Weekly case counts appear to be slowly declining since early April. Cowlitz County’s new per capita case rate is currently on par with the state average.

New COVID-19 hospitalizations in Cowlitz County have remained fairly steady since December and have been above the state per capita rate since February.

New COVID-19 deaths in Cowlitz County have been steady since around February, though they are lower than their peak over the holidays. New COVID-19 deaths in Cowlitz County have been above the state per capita average since around January.

The per capita molecular testing rate in Cowlitz County has decreased since mid-April and is currently about 40% lower than the state per capita rate.

For school operations (based on CDC guidance)

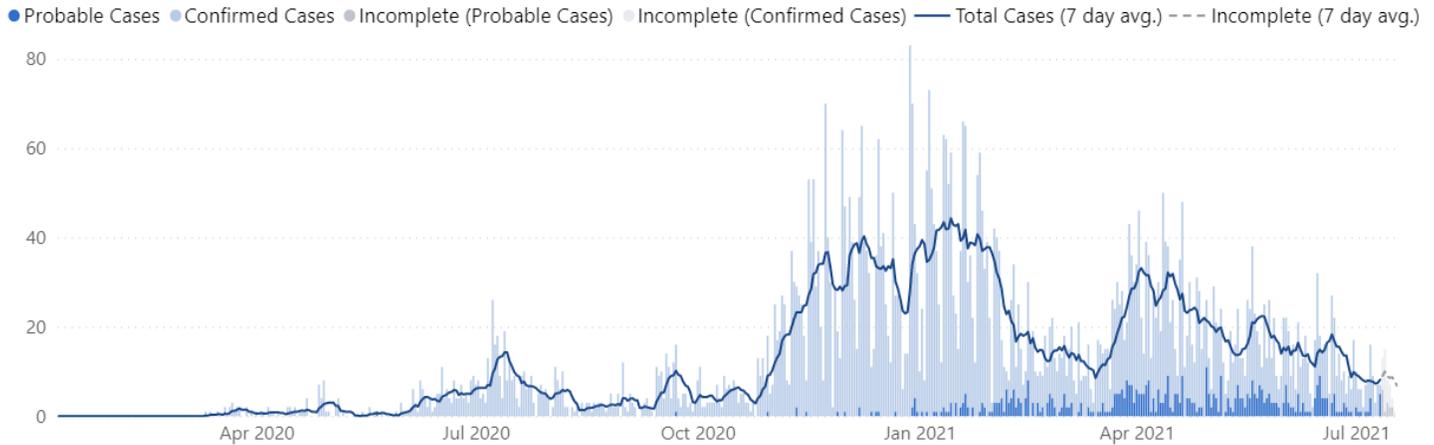
We are currently at a “Substantial” level of COVID-19 community transmission, with a **one-week** case rate of 57 cases/100,000 population and a percent positivity of 9.0%.

Note that the CDC’s case rate is a one week case rate, which differs from the two-week case rate used in Washington State. Cowlitz County’s most recent two-week case incidence rate is 106 cases/100,000 population.

Cowlitz County COVID-19 Epidemiologic Curve

This epidemiologic curve was screenshot from the Washington State Department of Health (state DOH) [Data Dashboard](#). The most current version of this curve can be found on the “Epidemiologic Curves” tab under “Cases” and “Cowlitz County”.

CASE COUNTS



Active cases

COVID-19 cases are considered “active”, or contagious, for 10 days after their symptom onset, or, for asymptomatic cases, 10 days after their test date. There are currently 82 identified active COVID-19 cases in Cowlitz County.

Deaths

The number of deaths reported by the state DOH includes both confirmed and suspect deaths. Confirmed COVID-19 deaths are those with a positive COVID-19 test (molecular or antigen) and have COVID-19 listed on the death certificate. Suspected COVID-19 deaths are those that occur within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test but do not have COVID-19 listed on the death certificate. Suspect deaths are removed from the state’s count if COVID-19 is later ruled out as the official cause of death following a clinical review. A clinical review may instead reclassify a suspect death into a confirmed death. As a result, the number of suspect deaths in the most recent month or two may decrease if they are ruled out or reclassified to “confirmed”. All confirmed and suspect COVID-19 deaths undergo a clinical review in Cowlitz County.

	2020										2021							Total
	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	
Suspect death	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Confirmed death	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	0	6	18	17	15	6	6	7	11	3	96
Total deaths	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	0	6	18	17	16	6	6	7	11	3	97

Additional information on COVID-19 deaths

- Over 95% of confirmed deaths had underlying conditions.
- 35% of confirmed deaths were associated with a long-term care facility.

Variants & breakthrough cases

Note that information on these topics is rapidly evolving and the data are very dynamic. This report includes the most up-to-date data available, and may change as time goes on.

Variants

- Genetic sequencing of COVID-19 viruses allows public health to identify which variants of COVID-19 are circulating.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [SARS-CoV-2 Classifications and Definitions website](#) provides information on variants being tracked in the US.
- 2.10% of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Cowlitz County (132 cases total) have been genetically sequenced.

Note that genetic sequencing can only be performed on COVID-19 cases confirmed with a molecular test. In addition, most confirmed cases are not sequenced.

- Cowlitz County Health and Human Services has identified 69 cases with a variant of interest or concern.
 - B.1.1.7 (alpha) – 24 cases
 - B.1.427 (epsilon) – 9 cases
 - B.1.429 (epsilon) – 13 cases
 - P.1 (gamma) – 23 cases

Because only a small proportion of COVID-19 specimens are sequenced, the cases listed in this report do not capture all COVID-19 cases in Cowlitz County with each specific variant of concern.

- Among those 69 cases:
 - 6 have been hospitalized for COVID-19
 - 4 have died from COVID-19
- Ages of Cowlitz County cases with a variant of concern range from below 18 through their 90's; the average age is 45.
- The latest statewide variant report can be found [here](#).

Given the small number of variant and breakthrough cases, Cowlitz County HHS is not releasing any additional information about these cases to protect privacy.

Breakthrough cases

- A "breakthrough case" is someone who becomes infected with COVID-19 after they are fully vaccinated. A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving their final dose of the vaccine series. The first Cowlitz County residents to receive the COVID-19 vaccine became fully vaccinated in mid-January.
- Breakthrough cases are currently identified when vaccine status is collected during the case investigation and the state DOH confirms that a case meets the state definition. Our nurses have not been able to successfully collect vaccine information from all cases. Because of this, additional Cowlitz County breakthrough cases likely exist that we have not identified.
- Cowlitz County Health and Human Services has identified 75 cases that meet the state definition of a confirmed vaccine breakthrough case.

The state DOH is working on a system to actively identify breakthrough cases by comparing COVID-19 vaccine data with case data. Once this system is implemented, additional breakthrough cases will likely be identified.

- Among those 75 cases:
 - 50 (68%) had COVID-19 symptoms
 - 6 have been hospitalized for COVID-19
 - 3 have died from COVID-19
- Ages of COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough cases range from 20's to 90's; the average age of breakthrough cases is 61.
- These 75 breakthrough cases identified to date represent 2.21% of cases since mid-January.
- The latest statewide breakthrough report can be found [here](#).

Spotlight: COVID-19 Vaccine Safety & VAERS

What is VAERS?

After any vaccine is authorized for use in the U.S., it continues to be monitored for safety and effectiveness.

An “adverse event” is a side effect or negative health outcome that occurs after someone receives a vaccine. Adverse events can range from mild, such as a sore arm muscle where a person received the injection, to severe, such as a death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rely on several data systems to monitor adverse events that occur after vaccination. One of these systems is VAERS, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. VAERS casts a broad net to capture adverse events that occur after getting a vaccine, regardless of whether or not the vaccine *caused* the adverse event. This helps experts identify unusual or unexpected patterns that might indicate a possible safety problem with a vaccine.

The database includes national data and is [accessible to the public](#).

Who can submit a report to VAERS?

Healthcare providers are *required* by law to report [serious adverse events](#) that occur after vaccination to VAERS, even if they are uncertain if the vaccine caused the adverse event. For example, if someone dies in a car accident the day after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, healthcare providers are required to report it to VAERS.

Anyone — such as patients, family members, healthcare providers, and vaccine manufacturers — can [report](#) any adverse event after vaccination to VAERS, regardless of the cause.

How are VAERS data used?

VAERS serves as an early warning system. A report to VAERS does not necessarily mean the vaccine caused or contributed to an adverse event. Instead, if VAERS finds a pattern of adverse events following vaccination, other vaccine safety monitoring systems conduct follow-up studies.

Last spring, for example, VAERS received the first reports that eventually led to the early detection of a blood clotting risk associated with the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. During a routine analysis of VAERS data, experts determined that the reports of blood clots did appear to be unusual, and use of the vaccine was paused temporarily.

During this pause, experts conducted a thorough safety review to understand how often the clots were occurring and if they occurred more often in certain groups of people. Use of the vaccine resumed after the CDC and FDA determined the overall risk was extremely low and the vaccine’s known and potential benefits outweighed its known and potential risks. The FDA’s [EUA Fact Sheet for Vaccine Recipients and Caregivers](#) lists blood clots with low levels of platelets under Risks of the Vaccine, specifically for women under the age of 50, because the risk appears concentrated in this group.

A report to VAERS does not necessarily mean the vaccine caused or contributed to an adverse event.

Are there limitations to conclusions we can make from VAERS data?

Yes. VAERS data must be interpreted with several limitations in mind:

- Reports may contain information that is biased, incomplete, inaccurate, or not able to be verified.
- Individual adverse events may be included multiple times if more than one person has reported the same event.
- *An adverse event that occurs after someone receives a vaccine is not necessarily caused by that vaccine.* The car accident scenario described above is a good example of this.

Reports claiming to draw conclusions about vaccine safety based on VAERS data alone are misusing this information.

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Where can I get more information?

Visit www.vaers.hhs.gov or the [CDC's website](#) to learn more about VAERS. Additional information about vaccine safety monitoring systems in the U.S. is [available here](#). For details about reported adverse events specific to COVID-19 vaccines, [click here](#).