



## **Yakima Health District**

1210 Ahtanum Ridge Drive

Union Gap, WA 98903

Phone (509) 249-6538

Fax (509) 249-6605

[www.yakimapublichealth.org](http://www.yakimapublichealth.org)

May 11, 2021

Dear Yakima County School Administrators,

The Yakima Health District (YHD) has been monitoring COVID-19 disease activity throughout the county closely. Currently, it has been recommended that high school and middle school students be spaced 6 feet apart, per the Washington State Department of Health guidelines that state:

“In areas with high community transmission, CDC and DOH recommend that middle and high school students use cohorting (grouping students) and at least three feet of distance between students or at least six feet of physical distance between students if cohorting is not possible. CDC defines high community transmission as COVID-19 case rate of greater than 200 cases per 100,000 population over 14 days.”

Recent data shows that Yakima County’s positive case rate is at 191/100,000 people over the last 14 days. This means that Yakima County is now meeting the Washington State Department of Health recommendations to allow schools to maintain at least 3 feet of distance between students. Moving forward, the Yakima Health District will also recommend schools to maintain at least 3 feet of distance between students as long as we continue to remain below 200 cases per 100,000 over 14 days.

Practicing physical distancing of at least three feet or more between students within groups and in the classrooms is required. Masking of students and teachers is also still required. According to CDC and State Department of Health guidelines, less than 6 feet of distance for more than 15 minutes is still considered close contact. School data from 4/25-5/8 shows that 16% (80/495) of all positive cases in Yakima County have been school aged kids (5 years old to 18 years old). In certain circumstances (described below), students must still maintain six feet of distance. Staff should continue to maintain six feet of physical distance from other staff and students in classrooms.

At least six feet of distance must be maintained for the following circumstances:

- Between staff in the school building and between adults and students.
- For all staff and students
  - In common areas, such as auditoriums.
  - When masks cannot be worn, such as when eating.
  - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, or physical education. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.

While we share in the excitement of being able to provide more opportunities for in-person learning, we must keep in mind that to maintain these opportunities, we must continue to follow the public health recommendations. Schools should still communicate regularly with students, families and staff emphasizing the importance of staying home when sick, maintaining physical distance (at least three feet between students and six feet between staff or between staff and students), and hand hygiene. Communication should be provided using multiple methods, such as posters, written letters, email, text message, phone, video conferencing. Make sure communication is in the language that parents best understand. Communication should also include information on where families can access the COVID-19 vaccine.

The more community members that can get the vaccine, the more we'll be able to control the spread of COVID-19, the more consistency we'll be able to provide our community and our students.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Larry Jecha', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sincerely,  
Larry Jecha, M.D./MPH  
Interim Health Officer, Yakima Health District