

COVID-19 and Washington State Courts

Public Health Risk Reduction Recommendations

Introduction

In response to the Governor's State of Emergency Proclamation on February 29, 2020, the Washington State Supreme Court issued various orders, modifying and curtailing some court proceedings, to protect court staff members, litigants and the public from acquiring or transmitting COVID-19. Now several months into the pandemic and recognizing the need to resume more courthouse based operations, the Supreme Court requested technical support in the development of guidance aimed at minimizing COVID-19 health risks associated with in-person court proceedings. More specifically, the Supreme Court is seeking public health guidance for:

- Consistently implementing specific strategies for reducing the risk of possible COVID-19 transmission within the courts; and
- Protecting the health of court staff members, jurors, litigants and the public during jury trials and other court proceedings requiring in-person court appearances.

This consultation aims to provide guidance and strategies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and related public health risks during jury trials and other in-person proceedings in the courts throughout Washington state. Proposed strategies focus on:

- Mechanical and engineering controls;
- Administrative controls;
- Changes in workplace practices;
- Use of personal protective equipment; and
- Technology and physical courtroom changes to increase person-to-to person distancing.

The strategies presented align with Department of Health, federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) requirements. They are not specific to any particular court facility. Individual courts are expected to evaluate and implement recommended strategies most applicable to their specific setting, and to seek individual consultation as needed to efficiently and effectively put strategies into operation. The courts are advised that this is a living document and the guidance presented is subject to change in response to the evolution of COVID-19 related science.

Background

On January 20, 2020 the first COVID-19 case in the United States was confirmed in Snohomish County, Washington. On February 29 Governor Inslee declared a state of emergency, and directed the implementation of the state's comprehensive emergency management plan to address the spread and impact of COVID-19. Following the issuance of various proclamations aimed at progressively slowing the spread of COVID-19 through social distancing, the governor issued the "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" proclamation on March 23, 2020. This proclamation ordered the closure of all non-essential businesses. This proclamation excluded court business which was recognized as "essential". Consistent with the governor's proclamations to protect public health, the Washington Supreme Court issued various orders aimed at protecting court staff members, litigants, jurors, and the public from COVID-19. Beginning March 18, 2020, the court suspended all civil and criminal jury trials and other non-emergent court proceedings, where social distancing could not be maintained. More recent orders have continued to encourage remote proceedings when appropriate, while allowing for phasing in of in-person proceedings; jury trials are planned to resume starting July 6, 2020.

The courts have unique opportunities and challenges to address the COVID-19 public health risks associated with in-person court proceedings. The Governor's proclamations (Stay Home – Stay Healthy and Safe Start-Stay Healthy) continue to acknowledge that courts are essential services and that the Judicial Branch is a separate branch of government operating under the direction of the Chief Justice. The Supreme Court has otherwise adopted and implemented COVID-19 orders and recommendations to protect the health of staff and others, consistent with the Governor's proclamations. Having been recognized by the governor as an essential service, the courts have latitude in their adherence to prescriptive guidelines, such as gathering sizes; which significantly impact court activities and for which viable alternatives are lacking ([*governor proclamation 20-25.4 issued 5.31.20*](#)).

COVID-19 related challenges to in-person court proceeding stem from the volume of court activities and the physical nature of court facilities. In Washington state, 39 superior courts and 148 courts of limited jurisdiction hold jury trials. Several thousand trials take place each year, and the backlog of trials that have been postponed since March 19, 2020 is quickly mounting. The average age of county courthouses in Washington state is 94 years and ranges from 53 – 133 years. Court facilities were not designed for the current volume of foot traffic, the volume of court proceedings, or the easy incorporation of modern communication technology. Jury trials typically occur in courtrooms where jurors, court staff members, and litigants are in close proximity. Jurors especially are typically seated shoulder to shoulder during trials, and deliberate in small conference rooms. Moreover, unlike other business settings, people often have no choice but to attend court proceedings, when summoned or when seeking legal redress.

The courts' fundamental duty is to uphold the rule of law through the administration of justice in civil, criminal, and administrative matters for the peaceful resolution of conflict. As a social construct, our rule of law, and hence the courts, are foundational to social welfare. At the heart of the justice system is the jury trial. To that end, it is important that jury trials and other in-

person court proceedings be safely resumed at the earliest possible time through the implementation of strategies that balance COVID-19 public health risks and the societal and personal value of these proceedings.

Epidemiology of COVID-19

Initially identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China; COVID-19 (*also known as: severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 or SARS-CoV-2*) quickly spread worldwide, infecting approximately 8 million people and contributing to the death of nearly 450,000 people as of this writing. Like other SARS viruses (SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV), COVID-19 is a zoonotic viral disease, believed to have migrated to the human population from live bats and/or pangolins sold at a public market for food.

COVID-19 was first detected in Washington state on January 20, 2020, and subsequently in all major cities across the United States. From that first detected case, COVID-19 quickly spread across Washington state. As of June 15, more than 25,500 cases have been confirmed and more than 1,200 deaths have been recorded. Nationwide, more than 115,000 deaths have been attributed to COVID-19.

The transmission of COVID-19 from person to person is believed to occur primarily via inhalation of droplet spray from talking, coughing and sneezing. Close personal contact (shaking hands, etc.) and hand contact with contaminated surfaces, especially hard surfaces, is also believed to contribute to the spread of the disease. Symptoms associated with active cases of COVID-19 may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus, and range widely from non-discernable to severe. Reported symptoms may include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell
- *Less common symptoms: gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.*

It is reported that infected people may be contagious for two or more days before symptoms appear (presymptomatic), and seven to 10 days after symptoms subside. Carriers may also be fully asymptomatic. Published reports suggest that asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers may comprise as much as 30 percent of an infected population. Unlike seasonal influenza, which has a case fatality rate of about 0.1 percent, the rate for COVID-19 is about 6 percent in the United States, according to Johns Hopkins University. People at higher risk for severe COVID-19 include those with underlying health conditions (e.g., chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, and diabetes), especially individuals >60 years old. Because COVID-19 is new in the human population, the science and public health understanding of this disease are evolving. For up to date information on COVID-19, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>. Current case counts, percent positivity and other valuable public health data

for Washington state and individual counties are available from the state Department of Health (DOH) at: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus> .

Public Health Response to COVID-19

The first case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States was confirmed in a resident of Snohomish County who had recently returned from China. As a result of this finding, DOH began routine communicable disease contact tracing. The agency also initiated public health emergency response activities to monitor and control the pending outbreak. Based on available scientific medical and public health information, Governor Inslee, under advisement from the DOH, CDC and others; issued emergency proclamations aimed at:

- 1) Protecting the health of people 60 years of age and older, especially people with underlying health conditions and those living in congregant and long-term care facilities; and
- 2) Reducing the speed of the outbreak to preserve hospital capacity necessary to address critical needs.

To address these two primary objectives, DOH, in coordination with local public health agencies, issued general public health guidance and recommendations that focused on social distancing, frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitizer, and sanitizing frequently touched surfaces that may be contaminated with the COVID-19 virus. Governor Inslee issued proclamations that mandated specific actions to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 from staff members and visitors at assisted living facilities and long-term care facilities. The governor issued subsequent proclamations to close schools and to restrict other large gatherings aimed at reducing the transmission of COVID-19 among the general population. To address the increasing rate of community transmission of COVID-19, the governor issued the “Stay Healthy, Stay Home” order. A complete list of the governor’s proclamations is available here: <https://www.governor.wa.gov/office-governor/official-actions/proclamations> . Information and recommendations for families, workers and businesses, as well as links to data and the latest COVID-19 news, are available at: <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/> .

COVID-19 Risk Considerations

On March 18, 2020, the state Supreme Court suspended all jury trials and many other in-person court proceedings, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and in response to the Supreme Court’s desire to protect the health of staff members and courtroom participants. The following guidance is intended to inform actions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 person-to-person transmission in the courts, especially with regard to jury trials. Implementation of prevention measures also serves to communicate the court’s concern and desire to protect public health and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among court participants.

While similar jurisdictional courts share similar risk factors (e.g., number of jurors), each court is unique with regard to: size, seating area, entrances and exits, waiting areas, ventilation, etc.

Therefore, it is up to each individual court to determine which strategies will comprise the constellation of activities necessary to reduce COVID-19 risk. Additionally, each individual court will need to tailor the actions outlined below to its particular setting and needs. For technical assistance, courts should contact their local public health department to request a consultation to address conditions specific to that court.

When considering COVID-19 transmission risk within a particular court jurisdiction, an important consideration is the rate of COVID-19 occurrence within the community served. The greater the prevalence of COVID-19 in a community, the higher the risk that a COVID-19 carrying member of the community will be summoned to participate in a jury trial or an in-person court proceeding. The rate of COVID-19 is likely to fluctuate over time and across communities for a variety of reasons, including the relaxation of social distancing measures.

Phased Resumption of In-Person Court Proceedings

The governor's [Safe Start Washington plan](#) (Proclamation 20-25.3 and 20-25.4), provides prescriptive goals for counties to progress through four phases towards their resumption of normal (pre-COVID-19) economic and social activities. As noted in the *Background* section above, courts have been deemed essential and not strictly bound to the metrics or limitations outlined in each phase of the Safe Start Washington Plan. As an example, courts are not bound by the gathering restrictions associated with any particular phase. These phases provide however, an indication of the overall COVID-19 public health risk within a county and therefore should influence the actions taken by limited jurisdictional courts to protect staff and other court participants from contracting or transmitting COVID-19 during or associated with in-person court proceedings. Therefore, to the extent possible, courts should strive to adhere to phase guidelines, which take into consideration:

- ✓ COVID-19 disease activity* (number and trends in COVID-19 cases and mortality),
- ✓ Health care system readiness (hospital capacity, number of ventilators and PPE availability),
- ✓ Testing capacity and availability (geographic distribution of testing, laboratory capacity, test kit availability, and number of tests performed per day),
- ✓ Case investigation and contact tracing (staffing availability, case management plans, rate of case investigations, availability of isolation and/or quarantine facilities), and
- ✓ Ability to protect populations at higher risk (number of outbreaks in congregate settings, demographic data to identify and monitor populations at higher risk).

* <https://www.coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/covid-19-risk-assessment-dashboard>

As counties are approved to progress from Phase 1 towards Phase 4, increasing social and economic activities are allowed to resume under the *Safe Start Plan*, as long as positive trends are sustained and required safety precautions are implemented. For the courts, it is anticipated that more in-person proceedings will generally resume in Phase 2 and beyond. Specific safety

precautions established for the professional business sector, which most closely aligns with court activities, can be found at the following URL: <https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/COVID19Phase2ProfessionalServicesGuidance.pdf>, and includes discussion of:

- ✓ Employee education about the coronavirus and how to prevent transmission,
- ✓ Maintaining physical distancing of at least six feet when feasible,
- ✓ Use of cloth facial coverings or other prevention measures, when social distancing is infeasible or not effective,
- ✓ Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer,
- ✓ Cleaning and sanitizing of frequently touched surfaces, and
- ✓ Employee screening for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 like the [Washington State Courts Health Screening Questionnaire](#).

From a public health perspective, activities aimed at reducing COVID-19 risks focus on primary and secondary prevention strategies.

PRIMARY RISK REDUCTION

Primary risk reduction strategies aim to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 into court facilities. These strategies focus on identifying and restricting entrance of symptomatic and presymptomatic COVID-19 carriers into the courts. These strategies are not unique to the courts nor to COVID-19, but are especially applicable due to the severity and transmissibility of this disease. Strategies to accomplish this are foundational to overall risk reduction and vary by constituent group: court staff members, jury pool, litigants, and spectators; because of their interactions outside and within the courtroom. These strategies include the following:

❖ **Court Staff**

- ✓ Increase knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms
- ✓ Increase education and training on communicable disease prevention
- ✓ Relax sick-leave use policies, where restrictive, and encourage the appropriate use of sick leave
- ✓ Enable and encourage telework in support of social distancing

❖ **Jury and Jury Pools**

- ✓ Education on court actions to keep people healthy
- ✓ Increase knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms and disease prevention, along with electronic health self-assessment at time of summons
- ✓ Pre-jury pool appearance, electronic health assessment follow-up notice/reminder
- ✓ Health screening for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or contact with a confirmed case within the past 14 days at assembly / voir dire
- ✓ Daily jury health screening for COVID-19 like symptoms and no confirmed case contact
 - ✓ See [Washington State Courts Health Screening Questionnaire](#)

❖ **Spectators**

- ✓ Restrict in-person attendance of court proceedings to the extent possible
- ✓ Establish and promote web-based viewing and other distant viewing options of court proceedings to limit potential exposures
- ❖ **Litigants**
 - ✓ Increase knowledge of COVID-19 and court concerns
 - ✓ Daily screening for COVID-19 like symptoms and no confirmed case contact during the previous 14 days
 - ✓ See [Washington State Courts Health Screening Questionnaire](#)

Across all constituent groups, education and self-disclosure of potential COVID-19 health risks, including recent contacts, are among the most important activities for limiting COVID-19 introduction into the courts. Overcoming the social and cultural stigma associated with health status self-reporting, along with reducing potential legal and financial barriers, will require creative thinking and technical consideration for efficient and sustainable implementation. Requiring the use of facial coverings upon entering a court facility, along with the use of hand sanitizer, are also critical activities that help to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Creating routine strategies and implementing a comprehensive communication/marketing plan that increases COVID-19 awareness and encourages health status self-disclosure, in addition to promoting personal protection and hand hygiene; will be essential to ensure continued community awareness and implementation expectations.

While the use of temperature checks is a common practice at some businesses and public gathering locations, such as airports; body temperature as an indicator of COVID-19 infection is problematic and a rather coarse triage practice. The questionable accuracy of measurement equipment, combined with the high prevalence of asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, impacts the overall value of body temperature as an indicator of infection. While courts are not discouraged from such screening, its public health value should be fully understood. The following link provides additional information.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak#:~:text=Temperature%20screening%20alone%2C%20at,tracking%20of%20incoming%20travellers.>

SECONDARY RISK REDUCTION

Secondary strategies for reducing COVID-19 risks in the courts focus on reducing the possible transmission of COVID-19 from presymptomatic and asymptomatic disease carriers to uninfected individuals during in-person court proceedings. These strategies should aim to reduce the potential transmission of COVID-19 from the time people enter a court facility until they depart. These strategies involve administrative controls, sanitary practices, and mechanical/engineering controls, and include the following:

Air filtration: when possible, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning filters should be upgraded to a minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) 13 (high-level) to improve air

filtration, or the highest filtration rate possible for the facility's existing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system.

Cloth facial coverings: cloth face coverings help to reduce the spread of airborne droplet spray associated with talking, coughing and sneezing. The use of face coverings should be required of all non-employees entering court facilities and disposable masks, such as KN95, are required by L&I for employees in medium risk environments, such as the courts. L&I guidance on the use of masks and face covers is available here: <https://lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-168-000.pdf> . Courts should make face coverings or masks available to all who enter court facilities, to support universal use.

Cohorting: creating and restricting the interaction of cohorts, such as juries and possibly other court staff, will help to prevent the spread and possible impact to overall court proceedings in the event that a positive case of COVID-19 is identified in a court.

Education and communication: educational materials focusing on the use of facial coverings, social distancing, and hand sanitizer use, should be prominently and frequently displayed to promote and reinforce these new social norms. Educational materials will also build confidence among court staff members and court participants, and should be made available in languages commonly spoken in the courts jurisdiction. The courts are advised to consult with the Governor's Office on developing and implementing a comprehensive outreach/marketing and communication plan to educate and inform all court participants.

Face Shields: the use of face shields can prevent direct exposure to sneezes and coughs when the wearing of a mask or face covering is not feasible due to a chronic health concern, is legally undesirable, of constitutional concern, or for other reasons. Use of face shields during witness and juror interviews, when a mask is not worn, should be considered.

Hand hygiene: the required use and availability of [EPA approved hand sanitizers](#) that contains at least 60% alcohol immediately upon entering court facilities is essential for reducing the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses. Common hand sanitizer dispensers should be conspicuously displayed, especially near common touch points such as elevators, doors, and counters. The ready availability of hand sanitizer and tissues via shared or individual dispensers is recommended for good personal sneeze and cough hygiene.

Masks: use of KN95 or equivalent mask is required by L&I for employees working in a medium risk environment, such as the courts. KN95 masks provide a higher level of protection than a cloth face covering, yet do not require an L&I Respiratory Protection Plan. Mask use should be mandated for all individuals when indoors in congregant areas of a building and where social distancing cannot be strictly maintained. L&I recently concluded that witnesses do not need to be masked, if physical distancing can be maintained and others in the vicinity are masked.

Physical barriers/partitions: the installation of Plexiglas or other clear partition between court staff, jurors, etc., when social distancing and the use of KN95 or similar mask is inappropriate, may be a viable solution. Consultation with L&I is recommended when considering this option. Such barriers provide a more permanent solution for reducing interpersonal exposure via droplet spray, but also require periodic sanitizing.

Physical space: when existing physical space does not allow for strict physical distancing, the courts are encouraged to investigate possible procedural changes, including the use of alternate physical space for jury assembly, jury selection and even the conduct of trials. With the strict use of facial coverings, physical distancing in courts can be reduced to three feet if alternatives for increased distancing are not feasible.

Social distancing: maintaining a distance of at least six feet between people reduces airborne transmission of viral respiratory diseases via coughs and sneezes, including COVID-19. Installing markers to indicate six-foot intervals has become common practice at entryways and other congregating areas in and around businesses. Increased distancing due to crowding can also be addressed through improved scheduling, schedule staggering, and extending hours. L&I has recently concluded that courtrooms are of medium risk for COVID-19 transmission, when health screening and other protective measures are employed, and as a result; three foot distancing is allowed when six feet distancing is not feasible.

Surface sanitizing: surfaces, especially common touch points such as doors, railings, counters, chair arms and backs, etc., should be frequently cleaned with an [EPA approved disinfectant](#) to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk. Within the courtroom, surfaces such as the witness stand, defense and prosecution tables should be cleaned and disinfected between proceedings and as often as necessary to prevent possible COVID-19 transmission.

Technology: incorporate modern technology to enable web viewing of court proceedings, eliminate wait times, improve scheduling, and increase efficiencies. Courts should seek consultation on the most effective uses of modern technology to reduce crowding, improve web-based communications/viewing, and increase operational efficiencies.

Traffic flow: when possible, direct the flow of people so that people's movements flow in the same direction to reduce crowding and contact time. This could include the use of alternate stairways, (one for up, one for down) and doors to promote unidirectional flow patterns. Regarding elevators, the number of people should be restricted to prevent crowding and increase distancing.

Ventilation: while scientific findings are yet to be published, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, and its European counterpart, the Federation of European Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Associations, acknowledge that indoor air dilution from increased fresh air ventilation likely helps reduce COVID-19 transmission, especially in congested indoor spaces such as deliberation rooms, staging areas and small court rooms.

While the above strategies were defined with jury proceedings and the jury selection process at the forefront of consideration, additional discussion is warranted. Those jurisdictional courts that convene very large jury pools may require significant changes in their procedures, venue or both; to accommodate physical distancing requirements of participants from arrival through jury selection. Electronic pre-screening, refined scheduling and sequential staging of smaller jury pools within the confines of existing facilities should be an initial consideration to reduce crowding and promote greater physical distancing during voir dire. Promoting the

unidirectional flow of people is recommended to reduce individual contact times and aid in transmission risk reduction. Additionally, the wearing of a mask or cloth face covering and use of hand sanitizer upon entrance into court facilities, should be promoted and mandated as fundamental public health actions to effectively lower COVID-19 transmission risk and protect all those who enter a facility. In shared buildings, it's critical that all business occupants adopt uniform prevention policies and practices to preserve the health of all.

Within the courtroom, staggered and or dispersed juror seating, use of physical barriers, increased room ventilation, and frequent hand and surface cleaning/disinfection with an EPA approved disinfectant, are recommended strategies to reduce public health COVID-19 related risks and are consistent with L&I's COVID-19 general requirements and prevention strategies (see below). Deliberation rooms, along with frequently contacted surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected between courtroom activities to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 between groups or individuals. As an example, frequently contacted surfaces around the jury box should be cleaned whenever the jury departs and the witness box cleaned between witnesses. Other high contact surfaces, such as restroom door handles, should be cleaned frequently throughout the day. The use of clear physical partitions (Plexiglas) may be a viable solution to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk when the use of a face mask is not required either because of an individual's underlying health condition and/or legal/constitutional considerations such as during witness testimony. Additionally, courts should review their individual practices from the standpoint of possible COVID-19 transmission and seek alternatives, such as the use of individual-supplied or disposable coffee cups.

The above strategies are presented as examples for reducing health risks associated with COVID-19 under the Governor's Safe Start Washington plan. These strategies are not meant to be all-inclusive nor address the specific nuances associated with localized implementation. The presented strategies are intended to spur new ideas and innovative strategies that are more locally applicable and sustainable. When considering investments in technology and other modernization strategies, courts should also consider the long-term value and benefits to overall court operations and efficiencies. As the risks associated with COVID-19 diminish and counties are approved to move into Phase 3 and subsequently Phase 4, courts may be able to scale back some risk reduction interventions that more heavily affect court procedures.

Protecting Court staff from COVID-19

While public health recommendations are provided above, the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) has established requirements for employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace for their employees. With regard to the courts, this includes all regular court staff, as well as jurors. L&I requirements focus on employee social distancing, use of personal protective equipment, handwashing, surface cleaning and prevention education. These requirements are summarized in *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention: General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces* released in April 2020 and available at: <https://www.lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-164-000.pdf>.

For the protection of court employees, L&I requires staff to wear a KN95 or similar mask at all times in medium risk workplace environments, such as the courts. Masks use among jurors is

mandated at all times, including within deliberation rooms where physical distancing is likely to be a challenge. L&I has determined that the court facilities are a medium risk workplace and six foot physical distancing is required when feasible. However, [L&I guidance](#) allows a minimum of three foot distancing when six foot distancing is not feasible and everyone in the vicinity is wearing a mask. Courts are encouraged to seek L&I consultation on the applicability of specific requirements in individual settings. Like other aspects of this pandemic, L&I requirements are evolving and subject to change with new information.

Responding to a positive case of COVID-19 in the Court

Although courts are taking extra precautions to prevent exposure to COVID-19, there is still a risk of exposure from an asymptomatic or presymptomatic carrier. If a court learns about a person with confirmed COVID-19 who was in their courthouse, they should call their local public health agency. Local public health will respond and make recommendations to the court to prevent further spread of the disease.

It is more likely that a court will be notified by public health of a confirmed COVID-19 case. A case is confirmed when a patient is tested and the test result is positive for COVID-19. When a case of COVID-19 is confirmed, the local public health agency will initiate case contact tracing to identify all potentially exposed people. If the infected person were a regular court employee or a juror, the court would be notified and all identified close contacts of the infected person would be required to self-quarantine for two weeks to prevent disease spread to others. Because of the potentially significant impact on the courts of a COVID-19 case, investing in COVID-19 education and cohorting prevention strategies, is a far better solution.

As COVID-19-related public health risks are unavoidable, acknowledging these risks and stressing individual responsibility to minimize them should be a primary focus. These risks vary by jurisdiction and are reflected in the underlying rate of COVID-19 within a jurisdiction. As of June 15, 2020, rates range from zero cases per 100,000 population in various Counties to a high of more than 600 cases per 100,000 population in Yakima County*. Although the risk in a jurisdiction may be small, it should be acknowledged at orientations, in trainings, and in briefing materials. Ensuring that all court staff members, jurors, and litigants understand how their personal decisions can affect overall community risk – and therefore risk to the courts – is an essential proactive step over which the courts have control.

* <https://www.coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/covid-19-risk-assessment-dashboard>

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the fabric of our culture in unimaginable ways, including the courts with regard to in-person proceedings. Consistent with the Governor's Safe Start Washington Plan and L&I workplace requirements, we recommend primary and secondary public health prevention strategies that aim to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 into the courts, and to reduce the risk of transmission within the courts. These strategies focus on:

health screening, distancing and physical barriers, use of masks/face coverings, hand and facility sanitizing, and education.

Although court processes are generally similar across jurisdictions, court facilities vary greatly. The underlying risk of COVID-19 transmission also varies greatly between jurisdictions, based on the prevalence of COVID-19 within a community. Therefore, the recommendations outlined in this report are provided for general consideration. It is up to each individual court to determine which strategies will comprise the constellation of activities that will most effectively reduce their overall COVID-19 risk. Additionally, each individual court will need to tailor its actions to its particular setting and needs. To help tailor strategies, courts may seek technical consultation from their local public health agency and/or from L&I. With our increase in knowledge, COVID-19 related policies, recommendations and requirements will change, and courts are encouraged to remain vigilant.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/coronavirus>
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.