LEWIS COUNTY
Washington's First County
est. 1845

Public Health & Social Services

360 NW North Street
Chehalis WA 98532

September 25, 2020

Dear Lewis County School Superintendents:

Since my last letter dated September 3, 2020, there has been little change in the danger COVID-19 poses to Lewis County. We currently do not meet most of the state benchmarks for stopping COVID-19. Our most recent 14-day total rate is now 90.6 cases per 100,000 population, nearly twice the county's rate in July and nearly four times the state's target of 25. Of all Lewis County residents tested, the number who show a positive result averages 5%, significantly higher than the state's 2 percent benchmark.

At the same time, I am encouraged by the amount of conversation and productive collaboration from many partners in our county with regards to returning children to school as safely as possible. We all now better understand the health consequences to our kids, their families, our school staff, and communities at large on either side of the open in-person/open remotely equation.

School administrators, teachers, staff; our local healthcare providers; government leaders; and your public health department all want our children to go back to in-person school. While the incidence of COVID-19 transmission throughout the county remains at worrisome levels, our collective understanding and preparedness to respond to a student or staff person testing positive for the COVID-19 virus has grown. We have ways to keep educating exposed students and supporting staff during their quarantine period.

While it is up to the individual school districts to determine how they will provide education, it is equally important that parents are given the choice of in-person, hybrid, or remote learning that works best for them and their family. The CDC has created a school decision-making tool for parents, caregivers, and guardians at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/decision-tool.html

Based on the above factors, as the Health Officer for Lewis County, I make the following recommendations.

Immediately
Schools should consider priorities in regards to resuming sports and academic programs, reviewing current WIAA and Washington State recommendations

O 360.740.1223 F 360.740.1438 TDD 360.740.1480

JP Anderson, M.S.W. Director
Rachel Wood, M.D., M.P.H. Health Officer

prior to making decisions about resuming sports and extra-curricular activities. Download state guidelines at:
https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/COVID19%20Phase%202%20and%203%20Sporting%20Activities%20Guidance.pdf

October 19, 2020
Schools should consider opening elementary schools for in-person instruction following an A/B or am/pm model. Consider staggering the start date for grades, especially for larger schools. Students should all maintain 6 feet of social distancing. Class sizes should be as small as the school can accommodate to minimize the number of students to be quarantined in the event of an exposure in the class.

November 16, 2020
Schools should consider opening middle schools for in-person instruction following an A/B or am/pm model. Consider staggering the start date for grades, especially for larger schools. Students should all maintain 6 feet of social distancing. Class sizes should be as small as the school can accommodate to minimize the number of students to be quarantined in the event of an exposure in the class.

December 14, 2020
Schools should consider opening high schools for in-person instruction following an A/B or am/pm model. Consider staggering the start date for grades, especially for larger schools. Students should all maintain 6 feet of social distancing. Class sizes should be as small as the school can accommodate to minimize the number of students to be quarantined in the event of an exposure in the class.

Because COVID-19 remains an active presence in our county, interventions in place to protect public health will not change. New positive cases and outbreaks have the potential to close re-opened classrooms and schools, requiring districts to return to distance learning models.

As Health Officer, I appeal to everyone in Lewis County, regardless of your own personal views on the coronavirus pandemic, to pull together. Tolerate masking, endure social distancing, put up with the inconvenience for the benefit of our children's futures. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wood M.D., MPH

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Lewis County Health Officer