

COVID-19 Safe Start Update 08/03/2021

Good morning, all.

DNR has now been operating under Tier 2 of its [COVID-19 – Steps to a Safe Start](#) plan for almost a month. I wanted to update you on how things are going and provide a couple of clarifications and reminders. DNR moved to Tier 2 on July 6. We do not have an immediate intention or a planned date for transitioning to Tier 3.

There has been one change to DNR's COVID-19 safety protocols since July 6: a DNR employee who has provided proof of vaccination is no longer required to self-isolate following close contact with a person who is infected with COVID-19 unless the DNR employee develops symptoms. This change is documented in DNR's [COVID-19 Response Checklist: Positive Test or Close Contact with Positive or Presumed Positive Person](#).

This and some other aspects of our COVID-19 safety protocols depend on whether an employee has provided proof of vaccination. The key phrase here is “provided proof of vaccination.” DNR cannot accept an attestation as substitute for proof of vaccination, or open options available to employees who have provided proof of vaccination to those who have not. Proof of vaccination should be promptly recorded in the appropriate vaccination verification log by a person who has been authorized to view and edit the log.

As communicated when we moved to Tier 2, DNR employees working in close-contact situations with members of the public—either indoors or outdoors—must wear a mask regardless of vaccination status. At this time, “public” means anyone who is not a DNR employee. We have heard that new state guidance excluding employees of other agencies from the definition of “public” may be forthcoming, but we have not yet received such guidance.

In response to an uptick in confirmed cases and close contacts among wildland firefighters throughout the Northwest Region, the Wildfire Program is adaptively adjusting COVID-19 safety practices for DNR's wildland firefighters—including contractors and firefighters from other organizations assigned to fires managed by DNR. This is being done in close coordination with DNR's wildland firefighting partners and recognizes recent changes implemented by USDA Forest Service.

The daily online self-screening that DNR implemented as part of its move to Tier 2 is a very important part of our ongoing safety precautions, and is especially important for detecting possible breakthrough infections of employees who have been fully vaccinated. I want to thank Angie Lane and Kirk Davis for making time in late June to configure and put in place our daily online self-screening. Angie's and Kirk's good work is a tremendous ongoing contribution to the safety of all DNR employees.

It's important that all of us who meet the criteria for daily self-screening do this diligently and consistently. Please carefully read the questionnaire and thoughtfully answer the questions every day, even if you've done it a dozen times before. Please don't be dismissive of the symptoms listed in the questionnaire. This is particularly important for personnel who are part of our wildland firefighting force and may be inclined to attribute symptoms such as a cough, difficulty breathing, or respiratory congestion to “camp crud” or smoke exposure. “Not caused by another condition” means a chronic condition such as asthma or confirmed allergies, not speculation.

The well-publicized delta variant is currently the greatest COVID-19 transmission concern in Washington and our nation; it is more transmissible than earlier variants of the virus and is thought to be driving the current surge in infections. DNR is currently experiencing an uptick in confirmed cases and close contacts including our first apparent employee-to-employee transmission in the workplace. The internal contact-tracing and self-isolation procedures that we have continually improved are up to the task and are serving us well in addressing this surge.

Our COVID-19 Response Management Team (RMT2) is tracking new information from Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Washington State Department of Health in order to maintain situational awareness. More importantly, RMT2 is closely monitoring direction from Washington State Office of Financial Management/State Human Resources (OFM/State HR) and Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (LNI). These are the two agencies that regulate COVID-19 safety in the DNR workplace. Neither OFM/State HR nor LNI has issued new direction since CDC's July 27 update of its masking and social distancing recommendations or Governor Inslee's July 28 news conference.

Over the weekend, DNR Safety Manager Chris Allen and I did a detailed crosswalk of DNR's COVID-19 safety protocols to current OFM/State HR direction and current LNI direction, to triple-check that what DNR is doing is in full compliance with current regulatory direction. DNR's current operating posture and safety protocols fulfill all aspects of this direction. I hasten to add that we are operating in a very fluid environment in which new information is forthcoming every day, and guidance is continually shifting. RMT2 is meeting at least twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursdays, and more frequently as needed to address items that require follow-up.

I very much appreciate your continued attention to our COVID-19 safety protocols and the huge effort that all of you are making to keep the DNR team healthy and productive. Thank you!

Please feel free to reach out at any time to your chain-of-command, DNR Human Resources, or the DNR Safety Office if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Best regards,

Lenny

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