



News Release

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Moving *ForWARD* into the next phase of Washington's COVID-19 response

Washington's long-term response focuses on Equity, Empowerment, Prevention, and Readiness

OLYMPIA – As Washington's COVID-19 response continues to evolve, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is laying out its long-term [ForWARD plan](#) to keep people safe and healthy as we move to the next phase of the pandemic and co-exist with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. To date, more than 13 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered across Washington, leading to one of the highest state vaccination rates in the country and helping the state maintain one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates among states.

“Washington has come a long way since January 2020, when the country's first confirmed case of COVID-19 was found in our state,” said Governor Jay Inslee. “I am proud of the steps Washingtonians have taken over the past two years to keep themselves, their loved ones, and their neighbors safe, as we worked together to fight this evolving virus. I appreciate DOH's efforts to create our state's *ForWARD* plan which provides one more tool to help us all keep one another safe and healthy.”

“Over the past two years, Washingtonians have shown incredible resilience and strength, stepping up to protect themselves and their loved ones by getting vaccinated, boosted, wearing masks, distancing, getting tested, and staying home when necessary,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health. “Together, we have saved tens of thousands of lives, but our work will continue. We aim to build on that success by empowering people to protect themselves, their families, and their communities, while ensuring our state remains ready for additional COVID-19 variants that may come our way.”

The [ForWARD plan](#) has three main priorities with seven commitments:

Engagement & Empowerment:

- The agency's main priority continues to be the health and safety of everyone in Washington. This includes preventing severe disease caused by COVID-19 and supporting healing and general wellness.
- DOH will monitor the science and COVID-19 updates to provide people and organizations across Washington with the latest health information, guidance, and resources to stay safe, and do so with an equity lens.

Prevention through Vaccines, Tests, and Masks:

- Vaccines are the most powerful tool available to prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. We will continue efforts that will help us further close equity gaps and support mobile outreach efforts.
- DOH has distributed millions of at-home tests through efforts like ["Say Yes! Covid Test"](#) and through local and tribal partners. We will work to expand these efforts while maintaining access to diagnostic testing.
- Masks are an effective safety measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. DOH is prepared to provide personal protective equipment (PPE), including a 60-day supply to support the healthcare system.

System Readiness:

- DOH is committed to proactive data monitoring and disease detection through genomic sequencing 10% of COVID-19 cases and using additional tools to gauge ongoing transmission trends and changes in conditions that signal a need to change our response.
- The agency will support health system capacity through workforce resiliency efforts and provide medical supplies such as ventilators and hospital beds and patient balancing across the system.
- Treatment and therapeutics are also key to preventing and treating COVID-19 and protecting the healthcare system. DOH will ensure access to available antivirals and monoclonal antibodies, particularly to areas or groups with higher disease burden and reduced access.

“While we don’t know when the pandemic will truly end, we do know how to protect ourselves and our communities from COVID-19. DOH is committed to following a path to recovery by empowering people, organizations, and businesses to come together to protect each other, keep our economy strong, our schools open, and our state moving forward,” said Deputy Secretary Lacy Fehrenbach.

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