

# Glossary of Terms

Relating to the novel coronavirus outbreak



Whatcom County  
**HEALTH**  
Department



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Whatcom County Health Department

**The purpose of this glossary is to assist you in understanding the words and phrases used relating to novel coronavirus in Whatcom County.**

**Antibody Testing:** Antibody blood tests, also called antibody tests, detect specific types of antibodies in your blood, which show if you had a previous infection with the virus ([CDC](#)).

**Asymptomatic:** Presenting no symptoms ([CDC](#)).

**Case Investigation:** A case investigation occurs when public health officials learn that someone has tested positive for COVID-19, and an interviewer reaches out to that person to determine who they have been in close contact with ([WA DOH](#)).

**Close Contact:** A close contact is a person who has been within about 6 feet of a person who has a confirmed novel coronavirus infection for a prolonged period of time or has had direct contact with secretions from a person with confirmed novel coronavirus infection ([WA DOH](#)).

**Cluster of Disease:** An unusually high incidence of a particular disease occurring at the same time and place ([CDC](#)).

**Community Spread/Community Transmission:** Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected ([CDC](#)).

**Contact Tracing:** Contact tracing is the part of the disease investigation that is done to prevent the virus from spreading further. It occurs when interviewers reach out to inform close contacts of their possible exposure. Every person interviewed receives guidance about how to keep themselves and others safe. Interviewers can also help connect people with resources they may need while they stay home for 14 days to ensure they are not sick (quarantine) or stay home to recover from being sick (isolation). Interviewers do not reveal the name of the person who tested positive for COVID-19 when speaking with close contacts ([WA DOH](#)).

**Coronavirus:** Coronaviruses belong to a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from common colds to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) causes coronavirus disease COVID-19 ([WHO](#)).

**COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019):** COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in December 2019 ([WHO](#)).

**Epidemiology:** Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related conditions or events in specified populations, and the application of this study to the control of health problems ([CDC](#)).

**Isolation:** The separation of a person or group of people known or reasonably believed to be *infected with a communicable disease and potentially infectious* from those who are not infected to prevent spread of the communicable disease. Isolation for public health purposes may be voluntary or compelled by federal, state, or local public health order ([CDC](#)).

**Laboratory Confirmed COVID-19 Case:** individuals with at least one respiratory specimen that tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 at a laboratory ([CDC](#)).

**Mitigation Strategies:** Community actions, such as social distancing, that are designed to help keep people healthy, reduce exposures to COVID-19, and slow the spread of the disease ([WA DOH](#)).

**Non Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):** Also known as community mitigation strategies, these are actions, apart from getting vaccinated and taking medicine, that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of illnesses. . Because a pandemic virus is new, the human population has little or no immunity against it. This allows the virus to spread quickly from person to person worldwide. NPIs are among the best ways of controlling pandemics when vaccines are not yet available ([WA DOH](#)).

**Novel Coronavirus:** A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold ([CDC](#)).

**Outbreak:** An occurrence of disease cases beyond what is expected, featuring cases clustered by time, space, or common behaviors ([CDC](#)). The Washington State Department of Health defines a COVID-19 community or workplace outbreak as two or more non-household cases at a workplace or event that have a plausible epidemiological at that location or event. A single case of COVID-19 among residents or staff of a long term care facility or other congregate living setting is also considered an outbreak. ([DOH](#)). For long-term care facility outbreaks specifically, the definition also includes occurrences with one resident or healthcare worker with a confirmed COVID-19 case, with one resident with severe respiratory infection resulting in hospitalization or death, or with two or more residents or healthcare workers who develop COVID-19 symptoms within 72 hours of each other ([WA DOH](#)).

**Pandemic:** A pandemic is a global outbreak of disease. Pandemics happen when a new virus emerges to infect people and can spread between people sustainably. Because there is little to no pre-existing immunity against the new virus, it spreads worldwide ([CDC](#)).

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Personal protective equipment, commonly referred to as "PPE", is equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. PPE used to protect against coronavirus includes masks, gloves, gowns, safety glasses and face shields ([OSHA](#)).

**Pre-symptomatic:** When an individual has COVID-19 and is infectious, but does not yet show symptoms ([CDC](#)).

**Quarantine:** The separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been *exposed to a communicable disease but who are not symptomatic*, from others who have not been so exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease ([CDC](#)).

**SARS-CoV-2:** The name of the virus that causes coronavirus disease (COVID-19). As the name indicates, the virus is related to the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) that caused an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003, however it is not the same virus ([WA DOH](#)).

**Self-Quarantine:** Self-quarantine is for people who have been exposed to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and are at risk of developing COVID-19. By self-quarantining, you protect others from potential exposure and decrease the spread of infection. A self-quarantine period usually lasts for 14 days, long enough to know you have become contagious ([Johns Hopkins](#)).

**Social distancing:** The practice of maintaining at least six feet of physical distance from any person who is not a member of your household.

**Stay Home Stay Healthy:** Stay Home Stay Healthy means staying home as much as possible, and only going out for essential trips, such as to visit the grocery store or pharmacy, or to travel to an essential job. People can go outside as long as they remain at least six feet from each other, and can still participate in activities such as bike rides, gardening, and dog walking—as long as they follow social distancing rules.

**Vaccine:** A product that stimulates a person's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease, protecting the person from that disease ([CDC](#)).