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August 3, 2020

TO: Spokane County Public School Superintendents
Spokane Private School Administrators

SUBJ: Education for Fall 2020

Since the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Snohomish County, Washington on January 21, 2020 and the first confirmed cases in Spokane County on March 14, 2020, almost 60,000 cases have been confirmed at this time in Washington State. Governor Inslee's **Stay Home, Stay Healthy** order on March 24, 2020 and the closure of K-12 schools March 12, led to a decline in the rate of disease across much of the state. Eastern Washington never saw the average effective reproductive numbers (Re) fall below 1, however, and since early May, it has continued to rise, as well as across the entire state. With this has come increased rates of infections, especially in younger individuals, such that the rate is now greater than it was during March-April. The Institute of Disease Modeling (IDM) report, **Schools are not islands: we must mitigate community transmission to reopen schools**, stated "community-wide mitigation efforts must improve significantly such that the effective reproductive number is below 1 at the end of August for schools to reopen in September without triggering exponential growth in COVID-19 burden."

Spokane County's COVID-19 profile is comparable to other Washington counties. Prior to Memorial Day weekend, there were 432 confirmed cases, since, 3384 cases (an increase of 783%). The incidence rate as of August 1, 2020 is 209.6/100,000/14 days.

Whereas knowledge of preventing COVID-19 has increased since the beginning of the pandemic, to include evidence supporting the use of cloth face coverings, national experience implementing disease prevention efforts for COVID-19 in the K-12 setting is minimal. Internationally, in-person instruction has been most successfully implemented when incidence rates are low and decreasing, i.e., $\leq 25/100/14$ days, and decreasing. Given the current high level and upward trajectory of COVID-19 rates in Spokane County, cases and outbreaks in schools will likely occur. These could negatively impact community-wide efforts to lower rates, would impose considerable demands and instability on school operations and conceivably outpace our collective efforts to control the pandemic.

*Schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being and provide our children and adolescents with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/speech and mental health therapy, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits. Beyond supporting the educational development of children and adolescents, schools play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity (AAP). While returning to in-person learning is a shared-goal by SRHD, doing so may come at a significant cost likewise shared by the entire Spokane community, especially our most vulnerable. **Based on our rates, the existing science regarding COVID-19, and school reopening, I strongly recommend beginning the year in remote/continuous learning for all students. Consider in-person learning for those who have special health or education needs that cannot be delivered through remote learning.***

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Lutz".

Bob Lutz, MD, MPH

Spokane County Health Officer