



Region 8 – COVID-19 – County Response Meeting Notes Ferry – Lincoln – Pend Oreille – Spokane - Stevens Counties

**Thursday, April 30, 2020
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm**

FACILITATORS: Jaime Bodden, WSALPHO and Mellani McAleenan, WSAC

ELECTED COUNTY OFFICIALS & STAFF IN ATTENDANCE:

Ferry

Nathan Davis, Commissioner and Johnna Exner, Commissioner

Lincoln

Rob Coffman, Commissioner; Scott Hutsell, Commissioner; Peggy Semprimoznik, Clerk and Mark Stedman, Commissioner

Pend Oreille

Dolly Hunt, Prosecuting Attorney/Coroner; Marianne Nichols, Auditor; Annabelle Payne, Director & County Coordinator and Karen Skoog, Commissioner

Spokane

Al French, Commissioner; Josh Kerns, Commissioner; Dr. Bob Lutz, Health Officer – Spokane Regional Health District and Ron Valencia, Executive Assistant

Stevens

Don Dashiell, Commissioner; Wes McCart, Commissioner and Steve Parker, Commissioner

Legislator(s):

Sen. Christine Rolfes and Sen. Shelly Short

Legislative Staff:

Elizabeth Allison, James Crandall, Jeff Olsen and Kellen Wright

LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE

Dr. Bob Lutz, Health Officer – Spokane Regional Health District

- Dr. Lutz and his staff were aware and monitoring COVID, but were not familiar with the disease
- Spokane already had a large communicable disease program, as well as a very strong emergency preparedness program
- 265 Spokane staff members and in Asotin 5 staff members
- Began early monitoring of returning travelers – they thought their first possible case was early February, as they worked closely with the CDC
- Lack of equipment is a very serious concern
- Provided “local” guidance for the Spokane community, as the message needed to be different from the western side of the state

LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE – cont.

- A state of emergency was called for the state and Spokane did as well
- Incoming large basketball tournament was scheduled, but Dr. Lutz made the decision to cancel, as travelers would be coming from all over the state
- Asotin County had their first case on April 3rd
- The health district has a good collaboration throughout the City of Spokane
- 360+ cases – maintaining currently

CHALLENGES AND LOOKING AHEAD

- The community is getting restless – currently working on messaging with some outdoor activities opening – could be challenging days ahead.
- Case investigations are labor intensive, will need additional workforce to manage.
- With the lives and livelihoods of Spokane businesses, they are working on steps to open businesses in a safe and responsible manner.
- A second wave is very concerning.... what's next?
- Public health has proven to be very important during this pandemic. Moving forward, this is a great opportunity for public health and the business sector. Dr. Lutz hopes that everyone will appreciate how important public health is and their role in keeping the public healthy!

IMPACT ON COUNTY FUNCTIONS

Ferry:

- Sporadic broadband services prove to be challenging.
- The local hospital would welcome elective surgeries right now.
- The drug court has been busy, as they're seeing individuals getting back on drugs.
- Concerns for local businesses to open. Who will open and who will permanently close?
- Loss of revenues for road/gas tax is very troubling.
- Would like to see a "slow opening" for Ferry county.

Lincoln:

- Agriculture based businesses continue to operate.
- The two local hospital are ready to get back to "normal" business.
- COVID cases have been very low.
- Commissioners are faced with a difficult decision in moving forward with the county fair – will it be cancelled or keep it scheduled for August?
- With the schools closed – meals are being produced and delivered to the community.
- Interest income is vital to the county – if rates continue to go down, the reserves will as well.
- The gas tax plays a vital role for funding for road improvement – will see a significant decrease in gas tax revenues.
- 60% of Lincoln county residences work in Spokane
- School children have experienced the challenging issues with broadband.

IMPACT ON COUNTY FUNCTIONS – cont.

Pend Oreille:

- Furloughs for the road department – anticipate losses with the gas tax.
- Concerns about the cuts on the state level and how it will impact county government.
- With decreased revenues, county services will suffer.

Spokane:

- Spokane is a consumer driven economy – with the loss of sales tax, it will have a significant impact on the mental health and the criminal justice system.
- 20-25% current loss in sales.
- PPE and tracking supplies are in short supply.
- Food banks have been greatly impacted – Second Harvest has been overwhelmed with the community need.
- With a backlog from the courts, would like to see an acceleration of reforms.
- Jail population has been reduced but criminal activity has increased.
- Tourism industry in Spokane has been hard hit – hospitality industry has a 90% unemployment rate.
- Currently, 45,000 are unemployed in Spokane.
- Construction/homebuilders are happy to get back to work.

Stevens:

- Shortage of ambulances drivers, as the reimbursement rates are very low – hard to retain and keep staff.
- Broadband issues are a huge problem for the tri-county area.
- IT department is understaffed – is an ongoing a concern and with financial transactions being completed on the internet – this is a very serious concern.
- Food banks have doubled/tripled their normal daily demands.
- Backlog in the courts – have met with attorneys – will see difficulty in rescheduling.
- What preventative measures will be required to reopen the courthouse and office buildings?
- Concerns for main street businesses – will they survive?
- Working with the local health jurisdiction and continue to have good conversations with doctors and hospitals. The county has a high degree of confidence in getting back to normal.

ANTICIPATED NEEDS MOVING FORWARD

Ferry

- Will send a letter to the Governor for a regional approach to reopen, want to get people back to work.
- Increased broadband needs, as the libraries are closed – the community does not have computer access.
- The Commissioners would like to see elective surgeries scheduled at the hospitals.
- Would like to see businesses reopen in a “safe way” to restart the economy.

Lincoln

- Would like to see churches open to their congregation.
- Moving forward – behavioral and mental health is very concerning.
- Would like to see some flexibility with the state.
- Request to the Governor to open “new” construction.

ANTICIPATED NEEDS MOVING FORWARD – cont.

Pend Oreille

- Very strong messaging to shop “local” but also “stay safe”.
- Regional reopening is needed right now.

Spokane

- Would like clear direction on “reopening” the community.
- Would like to see relief on the mandating functions from the state – request flexibility with the funds the counties are receiving.
- Want to reopen – as now is a very stressful time for everyone!

Stevens

- Budget concerns – what with the shortage look like?
- Sales and gas tax losses are very worrisome.
- CARES Act – how will it roll out, as the counties will be reimbursed for the expenses. The counties will have to spend their money first and then wait for reimbursements.
- Request that the churches be reopened – this is very important to the communities.