



# MEDIA RELEASE

## San Juan County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Public Health Recommendation to Cover the Face**

April 5, 2020: Following a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revision to public health guidelines, San Juan County health officials recommend islanders cover their nose and mouth when leaving home for essential travel allowed under the Governor's extended order. The face coverings do not have to be hospital grade but need to cover the nose and mouth. For example, bandanas, fabric masks and neck gaiters are acceptable. Fabric covers and bandanas can be washed and used again.

A good summary of the new guidance is available [from the WA Department of Health HERE](#).

Previously, public health experts had not recommended the large-scale use of face coverings. "When the situation changes, the rulebook changes," said Dr. Frank James, San Juan County Public Health Officer. "We're seeing large numbers of transmission from infected persons without symptoms and that means our strategy must change too. Covering your face doesn't change the orders everyone must abide by to stay home as much as possible and maintain social distancing. It's an extra layer of protection that we need to add."

The rationale for covering one's face comes from the belief that transmission occurs primarily through droplets from an infected individual, which fabrics can easily filter. This reduces the risk a well person will breathe those droplets in, and protects others who are near to someone with no or mild symptoms who may not yet realize they have the illness.

Face coverings can be fashioned from simple everyday items and the public should not be using hospital grade masks that are needed by healthcare providers. A number of informal local efforts to produce and distribute cloth masks are springing up, and may be a source of face coverings for those who need them. Please be sure to thoroughly wash any donated masks in hot water before wearing for the first time.

Children under the age of two, or anyone who can't safely wear a face covering for any number of reasons should not follow this new guidance.

Face coverings should be worn anytime a person is outside of their home in a public space, even in offices of essential businesses. "The data doesn't lie and clearly covid-19 is spreading and growing," emphasized Dr. James. "That means that flattening the curve requires another layer of aggressive protection against the virus. Please take the additional steps to cover your face."

Gov. Jay Inslee has extended the statewide "stay-at-home" order through May 4 in an effort to combat the spread of COVID-19 in Washington. The order will keep non-essential businesses closed and most of the state's more than 7 million residents home through May 4, saying social distancing measures must remain in place an additional month to minimize the spread of the coronavirus.

Health officials continue to stress that frequent hand washing, social distancing and staying home are the best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Stay in your place. Maintain your space. Cover your face.

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