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August 5, 2021

**FIRE AGENCIES TAKE MEASURES TO PROTECT COMMUNITY, FIREFIGHTERS
FROM COVID DELTA SPREAD**

Snohomish County fire agencies are stepping up measures to protect firefighters and the communities they serve from a dangerous new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As frontline healthcare workers, firefighters play a vital role in responding to COVID-19, which has killed more than 600 people and sickened more than 40,000 in Snohomish County alone. Just as our county and state were preparing to turn the corner on this virus, the Delta variant is creating a new threat that requires a new and urgent public safety response.

Following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Snohomish Health District, all fire personnel will resume wearing face masks indoors and in public settings. Fire stations are closed to the public and fire agencies may take additional measures to limit public interactions beyond emergency services. Firefighters will continue to wear extra protective equipment on emergency calls.

“COVID continues to change – and we need to change with it,” said Mukilteo Fire Chief Chris Alexander, president of the Snohomish County Fire Chiefs Association. “Since the start of this pandemic, Snohomish County fire agencies have worked together, adapting to ensure our firefighters are healthy and always ready to serve. We’ll continue to meet this challenge, no matter how long that takes, because it’s important to us to keep our crews and communities safe.”

The Snohomish Health District reports COVID-19 case rates have nearly tripled in the last five weeks. COVID-related hospitalizations are also increasing while ICU beds are near capacity. About 85 percent of recent cases sequenced in Washington state were caused by the Delta variant, which is roughly twice as contagious as the original COVID strain and may cause more severe disease, according to the CDC.

Vaccinations remain our community’s best defense against COVID, greatly decreasing the likelihood of severe illness, hospitalization and death. Wearing face masks in indoor public settings is also recommended as an additional layer of protection, whether vaccinated or not. For information on how to get a COVID-19 vaccine, visit <https://vaccinelocator.doh.wa.gov/>.

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