

Additional Meeting
Materials
BOARD OF HEALTH



King County
King County Board of Health
Director's Report

Date: January 16, 2025

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Stay current on Public Health trends and news:

I invite King County Board of Health Members and Alternates to stay updated on important news and local health trends through Public Health – Seattle & King County's blog and online dashboards:

The Public Health Insider blog:

[PUBLIC HEALTH INSIDER – Official insights from Public Health - Seattle & King County staff](#)

Data dashboards:

- [Respiratory virus data dashboards: COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV - King County, Washington](#)
- [Overdose data dashboards - King County, Washington](#)
- [Climate Impacts on Health - King County, Washington](#)

Respiratory illnesses

The winter is typically when we see more respiratory illnesses that spread from person to person when germs from someone who is sick get into the air when they breathe, cough or sneeze and someone else breathes those germs in.

RSV has been increasing in King County since October. Rates of emergency department visits for RSV have started to come down over the past couple weeks, so RSV may have peaked, but is still circulating at elevated levels.

While RSV can be mild in healthy adults, people at high risk such as babies, young children, and older adults can develop very serious illness resulting in the need for hospitalization. Since 2023, there are immunizations for babies and young children that can protect against severe illness and Public Health – Seattle & King County recommends that young children, pregnant people and older adults speak to their doctor about getting the recommended immunization.

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a vaccine-preventable disease caused by a bacterial infection. In 2024, we've been seeing an especially high number of whooping cough cases in King County. This year, we've had **more cases of whooping cough in 2024 than we did in all three prior years combined**. This is especially concerning because whooping cough can cause very serious symptoms for babies and young children.

Flu has been increasing over the past few months and we continue to see more emergency dept. visits than we did last season. We don't know yet if flu has peaked in our area for the season, or if rates will

start to increase again, but given the amount of illness currently circulating from flu, it's important to follow prevention steps.

COVID continues to circulate, but severe outcomes are at lower levels than we've seen since beginning of the pandemic.

The good news is that we have multiple tools to help keep us safer from these respiratory illnesses – COVID, flu, RSV, and whooping cough. We encourage people to make sure they are up to date with all their vaccinations. Wearing a well-fitting, high-quality mask and improving ventilation are key strategies to reduce the risk of infection. And it's a good reminder that if you're sick, stay away from others—even mild illness can cause more severe illness in others. If you are sick, talk to your doctor about getting tested and treatment early if you are eligible.

Learn more about respiratory illnesses and prevention: [Respiratory illnesses - King County, Washington](#)

Gastrointestinal illnesses

Winter also heralds an uptick in gastrointestinal illnesses. If you've been following the news in recent weeks, you may have [seen stories](#) about outbreaks of norovirus – a highly contagious virus. It's present year-round, but most outbreaks occur during November to April, when people are more regularly in close quarters indoors.

Learn more about norovirus: [New year, new norovirus outbreaks: Let's add 'hand washing' to the resolution list! – PUBLIC HEALTH INSIDER](#)

Salmonella outbreak in King County

Public Health is investigating an outbreak of salmonellosis (caused by *Salmonella* bacteria) associated with Mary Pilgrim Inn, a supportive emergency housing site in Seattle. Many of the people became sick after eating food served at two Christmas dinners on December 25, 2024, or eating leftovers from those dinners on December 26, 2024. The food served at these events was only available for Mary Pilgrim Inn clients and their guests as well as staff; food was not available to the general public. The food served at the Christmas dinners was prepared in a private home setting.

Since December 30, 2024, at least 38 people who attended the Mary Pilgrim Inn Christmas dinners have become sick with symptoms of salmonellosis and at least 22 of these people have tested positive for *Salmonella*.

We have visited Mary Pilgrim Inn three times between December 31 and January 7 to speak with staff members about the preparation of food served at the Christmas dinners, give information on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, and provide guidance on improving food safety in the kitchen.

Mary Pilgrim Inn staff and management have been fully cooperative with this investigation.

Public Health did not identify any food safety issues from other food sources at May Pilgrim Inn that could have contributed to this outbreak. We will continue to work with Mary Pilgrim Inn and provide support during this outbreak. We are also sharing updates about this outbreak on our [webpage](#).

H5N1 bird flu prevention

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that [H5N1 bird flu](#) is widespread in wild birds around the world and is causing outbreaks in the United States in poultry and dairy cows. This has resulted in recent human cases among US dairy and poultry workers, including in Washington State. On January 6, the U.S. recorded the first human death from bird flu in Louisiana.

In King County over the past two years, bird flu has been detected in wild birds, backyard chickens and other animals over the past two years, but has not been identified in pets, dairy cows or people. Public Health – Seattle & King County is monitoring the situation closely.

There has been no evidence of human-to-human transmission and the current risk to the general public remains low. However, those who interact with animals like dairy or poultry farm workers are at higher risk and should wear protective equipment. People should avoid touching sick or dead birds or other animals.

Keep an eye on backyard chickens and report any sick or dead backyard birds to the Washington State Department of Agriculture at 1-800-606-3056. If you come across dead or sick wild birds, report to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife at WDFW.wa.gov.

Public Health also recommends staying up to date with recommended annual flu vaccines. This may be especially important for people who may have frequent exposures to infected birds or animals. While getting a seasonal flu vaccine only prevents seasonal flu and will not protect against H5N1 bird flu, getting the seasonal flu vaccine can help reduce the prevalence of seasonal flu and might reduce the very rare risk of coinfection with a seasonal flu virus and an avian virus at the same time, and the theoretical risk that reassortment between the two could result in a new virus.

More information from Public Health: [Avian influenza - King County, Washington](#)

2026-2031 Medic One/EMS Levy Update

The county-wide voter-approved Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy that supports our world-renowned Medic One/EMS system expires December 31, 2025. The region just completed an [extensive planning process](#) to develop a new Strategic Plan and levy for King County voters to consider renewing in 2025. Beginning this February, the process brought together regional leaders, decision-makers and Medic One/EMS partners to collectively develop recommendations to direct the system into the future.

As in past years, the EMS Advisory Task Force oversaw the development of the recommendations and was responsible for endorsing broad policy decisions, including the levy rate, length, and ballot timing.

In late September, the EMS Advisory Task Force endorsed running a 6-year, 25-cent EMS levy on the November 2025 general election ballot. This 25-cent levy rate means that an owner of a \$800,000 home in our region will pay \$200 in 2026 for some of the nation's most highly-trained medical personnel to arrive within minutes of an emergency – at any time of day or night, no matter where in King County.

Developing the 25-cent levy is just one of many steps to getting the levy on the November 2025 ballot. Per state law, King County must now obtain the support of those cities with 50,000 or more in population and the King County Council to put to measure to the people. The EMS Division is

scheduling briefings for the City Councils of those 11 cities and the County Council to walk through how the levy will support the regional system. A 2025 Board of Health briefing is in the works.

If you have any questions about the levy or the levy planning process, please contact Joy Carpine-Cazzanti, Board of Health Administrator at KCBOHAdmin@kingcounty.gov.

Preventing gun violence

In Summer 2024, King County Executive Dow Constantine launched 100 Days of Action from July to October to address the rise in firearm incidents in King County. Coordinated by the Public Health – Seattle & King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention, the 100 Days of Action Initiative utilized various strategies to concentrate attention and mobilize resources to combat gun violence. These strategies included funding directed toward community-led initiatives and programs that supported youth at risk for involvement in gun violence and victims and families directly impacted, in addition to increased public awareness of community violence intervention practices.

Initial results from the investment in the community-led initiative include:

- Adding 12 community violence intervention specialists to support the work through the end of 2024.
- Extending critical incident response, outreach, and pop-up event hours.
- Strengthening a plan for safe transitions back to school for south King County students.
- Training staff and recruiting for Peace Camps that will serve up to 40 young people at the highest risk for involvement in gun violence.
- Conducting 13 community safety events, including gun lockbox distributions.

Highlights from additional investments in the 100 Days of Action include:

- Invested \$250,000 in victim support services through Harborview Medical Center’s hospital-based and community-linked intervention program through the end of 2024, providing emergency help so far to 70 people.
- Distributed over 2,000 gun lockboxes
- Administered a countywide survey to gauge public perception of gun violence in King County.
- Conducted strategic community engagement with underserved communities experiencing increases in gun violence, including the East African, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, and veteran communities.
- Implemented a public awareness campaign reaching over 1 million users through earned and owned media.
- Updated an online resource guide to provide information and access to emergency resources and community-based services.
- Strengthened partnerships with law enforcement agencies, the prosecuting attorney’s office, and community accountability groups.
- Developed a joint legislative agenda for the upcoming Washington state legislative session.

This month the Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention will begin developing a comprehensive five-year plan to implement focused, evidence-based solutions for reducing gun violence throughout King County.

Learn More: [King County’s 100 Days of Action mobilizes resources to combat rise in gun violence | by Dow Constantine | KingCounty | Medium](#)