

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Washington State K-12 Schools

Washington State Department of Health

June 30, 2021

Executive Summary

- This report describes COVID-19 outbreaks in K-12 schools that were reported to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).
- A total of 301 COVID-19 outbreaks occurred in K-12 schools between August 1, 2020 and May 31, 2021.
- 1139 COVID-19 cases were associated with outbreaks in K-12 schools. Seventy percent of COVID-19 outbreaks involved two or three cases.
- The highest number of outbreaks reported have been in April and May, 2021 with 63 and 57 outbreaks reported respectively so far. This coincides with the [Children and Youth Mental Health Crisis Emergency Proclamation](#) of the Governor requiring in-person education for K-12 schools starting on April 5th and April 19th.
- Sixty five percent of COVID-19 cases were students aged 18 and under.

Methods

This report was created using information from COVID-19 test results, COVID-19 outbreaks reported by local health jurisdictions to DOH, and DOH interviews with K-12 school administrators or COVID-19 coordinators. The investigation of COVID-19 cases to confirm that a cluster meets Washington State's outbreak definition is time intensive, therefore, the number of cases and outbreaks reported by a local health jurisdiction may change over time as outbreak details become available.

Definition of a COVID-19 Outbreak in Washington State K-12 Schools

A COVID-19 outbreak in a K-12 school is considered when the following criteria have been met:

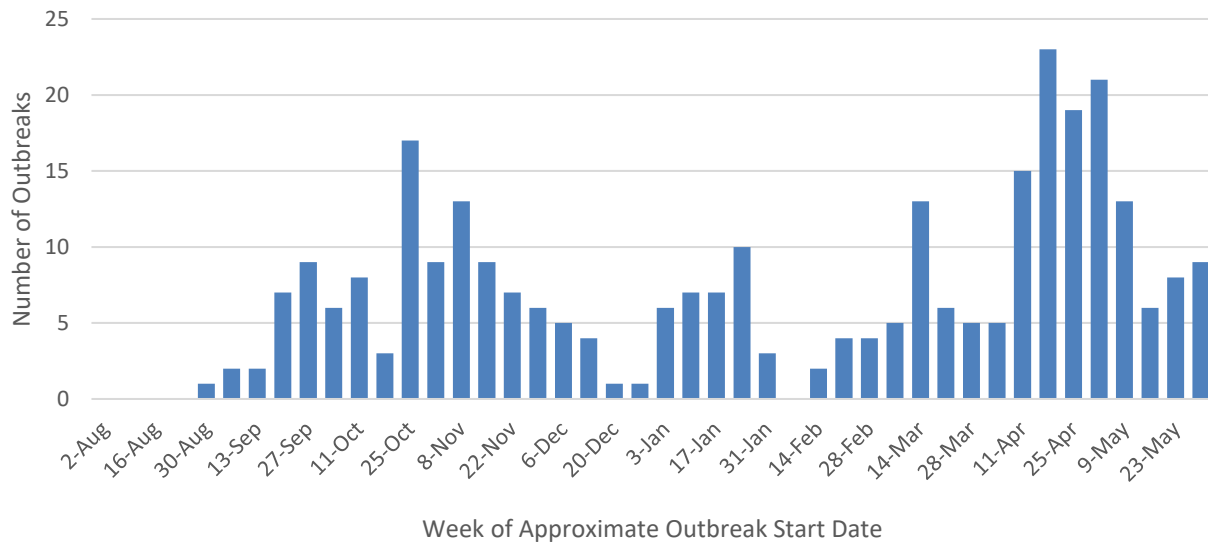
- There are two or more laboratory-positive (PCR or antigen) COVID-19 cases among students or staff.
- The cases have a symptom onset within a 14-day period of each other.
- The cases are epidemiologically linked.
- The cases do not share a household.
- The cases are not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting.

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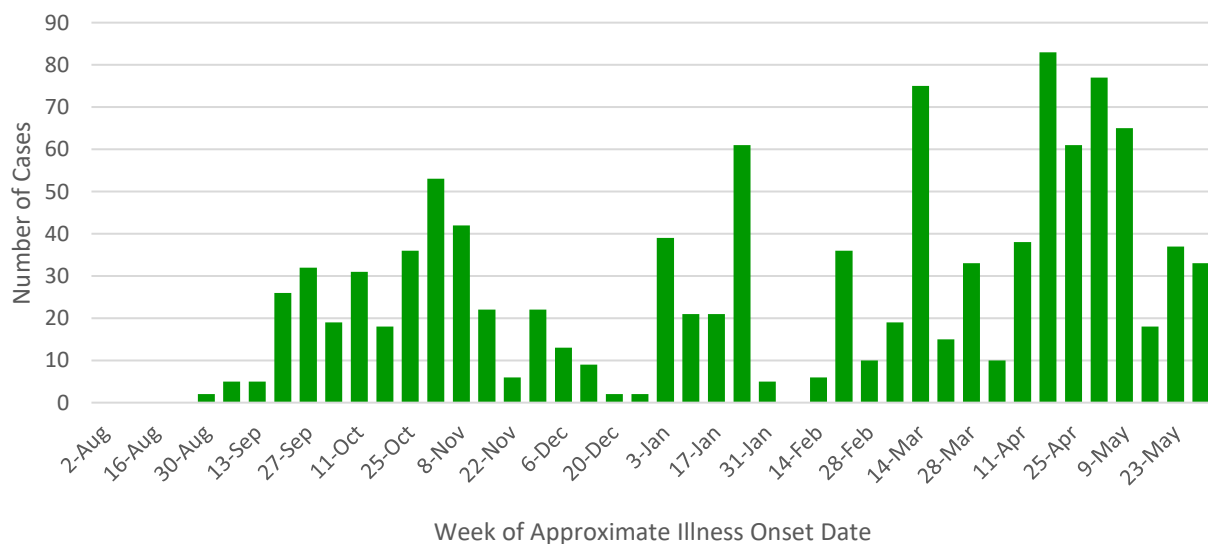
COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington State K-12 schools, by week of approximate outbreak start date

The following epidemiologic curve shows the weekly count of the 301 COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington State K-12 schools between August 1, 2020 and May 31, 2021.



Cases associated with COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington State K-12 schools, by week of approximate illness onset date

The following epidemiologic curve shows the week of approximate illness onset of the 1139 COVID-19 cases that were associated with outbreaks in K-12 schools. The approximate illness onset date is defined as the date when a case's COVID-19 symptoms began. If the case was asymptomatic, or the symptom start date is unknown, the illness onset date is when the case was tested for COVID-19. Cases from a specific outbreak can be spread out over time, so the cases reported in a given week may not all be associated with the outbreaks reported in the same week.



COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington State K-12 schools, by county

Local health jurisdictions reported 301 COVID-19 outbreaks that occurred in K-12 schools across twenty-two counties between August 1, 2020 and April 30, 2021. The number of outbreaks by county ranged from 1 to 66. A total of 1139 COVID-19 cases were associated with these outbreaks. The median number of cases per outbreak was two. Seventy percent of all outbreaks involved two or three cases. The smallest outbreak involved two cases, and the largest involved 36.

In April, all students were required to be offered a hybrid option to return to school, per the [Children and Youth Mental Health Crisis Emergency Proclamation of the Governor](#). This went into effect on April 5th for all students in kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade, and on April 19th for all remaining K-12 students. Prior to April, school districts were in different phases of re-opening, and there was significant variation in the number of schools open and the proportion of students receiving in-person instruction by jurisdiction. These differences will account for some of the variation in the number of outbreaks reported by local health jurisdictions. Information on school re-opening by district is collected by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and can be found [here](#).

County	Number of Outbreaks	Number of Associated Cases	Median Cases Per Outbreak
Benton	9	28	2
Chelan	1	2	2
Clark	14	33	2
Cowlitz	9	22	2
Franklin	9	21	2
Grant	6	17	3
Grays Harbor	5	35	2
King	66	242	2
Kitsap	11	63	3
Lincoln	4	69	18
Okanogan	1	7	7
Pierce	45	112	2
San Juan	1	8	8
Skagit	3	7	2
Snohomish	36	128	3
Spokane	43	232	4
Stevens	2	4	2
Thurston	8	27	3
Walla Walla	3	7	2
Whatcom	9	33	3
Whitman	2	9	5
Yakima	13	31	2
Total	301	1139	2

Characteristics of Washington State K-12 schools

Among the 301 K-12 schools that experienced a COVID-19 outbreak, 71 (24%) were private, and 230 (76%) were public. At the time of their outbreak, five schools reported a fully remote instructional model; 20 schools were teaching fully in-person; 36 schools were using a hybrid instructional model; and 19 schools were primarily remote with exceptions for some groups of students, such as those with special learning needs. A hybrid model includes schools that were alternating in-person learning with remote learning, using phased in grade levels, or some combination of both. The remaining 221 outbreaks either reported another learning modality or data on their learning modality was unavailable.

	N	%
Public/Private		
Public	230	76
Private	71	24
Learning Modality		
In Person	20	7
Hybrid	36	12
Remote	5	2
Remote with exceptions*	19	6
Other/Unknown	221	73
* Exceptions include in person learning for students with special learning needs		

Characteristics of cases associated with COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington State K-12 schools

Among the 1139 COVID-19 cases that were linked to outbreaks in K-12 schools, the median age was 16 years. Forty six percent of COVID-19 cases were Non-Hispanic White, and 53% were female. Eleven COVID-19 cases were hospitalized overnight, and there were zero reported deaths. Of the hospitalized cases, all were among adult staff. Hospitalizations are reported if the case was hospitalized at least overnight and are reported to DOH through LHI reporting and the WA DOH hospital surveillance system.

	N	%
Median Age	16	-
Age Group		
5 - 9	153	13
10 - 14	199	18
15 - 19	388	34
20 - 29	50	4
30 - 39	77	7
40 - 49	118	10
50 - 59	91	8
60+	59	5
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic	92	8
Non-Hispanic White	518	46
Other	109	10
Unknown	416	37
Sex		
Female	577	53
Male	517	47
Hospitalization overnight	11	1
Deaths	0	0