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# Cases

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regardless of vaccination status.

Previously, only unvaccinated participants were required to be tested, but now, all will be, with testing frequency increased to three times a week. At least one of those screening tests must occur no sooner than the day before the competition, and ideally and whenever possible, the day of the event.

The wrestling tournaments that prompted the enhanced guidelines all happened on Dec. 4, and included the John Birbeck Invitational, in Lacey; Ed Arima Duals, in Sumner; Lady Jags Kickoff Tournament, in Puyallup; and Yelm Girls' Varsity, in Yelm.

On Dec. 4, the Vashon girls' wrestling team attended one of those tournaments — the Lady Jags Kickoff Tournament. Another tournament, also attended on Dec. 4 by the Vashon's boys' wrestling team, was held in Auburn but has not been identified by DOH as a site of an outbreak.

However, the December outbreak at Vashon High School, following both tournaments, resulted in positive tests for 10 students in the weeks following both tournaments, with eight of the cases affecting members of both boys' and girls' wrestling teams. The remaining

cases among students affected close contacts of team members. More than half the student body of the high school was deemed to have had close contact with the infected students.

In addition, Vashon Medical Reserve Corps traced three community cases to exposure from infected students, including some family household members.

Last week, Vashon's COVID response team issued an appeal to the community for caution, saying it was "highly likely" that half of the local high school cases were Omicron, pending confirmation with gene sequencing.

In a phone call, MRC co-coordinator Dr. Jim Bristow explained his group's determination of the likelihood of Omicron in those five cases.

PCR nasal swab tests for all COVID cases target three specific viral genes, he said, with a result showing two or three of those genes amplified as a definite case of COVID. A result showing one amplified gene is determined to be a possible case of COVID. In cases with the Omicron variant, he said, one of the three genes, called the "S" gene, carries a mutation that prevents its amplification, and five tests of wrestlers on Vashon showed this result.

However, Bristow said, this preliminary identification of Omicron was not

100% definitive, as other variants, in low percentages, can also carry this mutation. The only way to be sure that the wrestlers' cases were Omicron, he explained, is through the much more expensive process of sequencing the VIRAL genome from these samples — a process he said he expected King County or the state to undertake in cases relating to the multi-district outbreaks among high school wrestlers.

The good news, said Bristow, is that it currently appears, based on wide testing of close contacts at VHS, that the likely cases of Omicron had not spread widely throughout the school. It's a hopeful sign, Bristow said, that masking and other mitigations still worked in the school setting, even against the likely Omicron variant.

## Superintendent says the district will review mask adherence

The DOH, in its press release detailing new testing requirements for those in high-risk indoor sports, also reminded the public that already-existing requirements for all K-12 sporting events include required mask-wearing for all athletes, coaches, trainers and support personnel in indoor public spaces except when actively competing.

However, a photo

obtained by The Beachcomber that was taken during the tournament in Auburn shows 10 members of the Vashon team sitting side by side on the sidelines of a match, intently watching their teammate compete. All were unmasked.

(The Beachcomber is not running the photo out of sensitivity to the student-athletes.)

The Beachcomber shared the photo with McSheehy and a high school wrestling coach, requesting an explanation of the apparent violation of state masking requirements.

In an email, McSheehy responded to the press inquiry.

"Vashon Island School District always welcomes feedback from our school community that helps us improve our safety practices and protocols," McSheehy wrote. "Thank you for sharing your concerns about athletics and lapses in masking. We have high expectations for student safety and will use this recent outbreak as an opportunity for all VISD athletic programs to review our WIAA COVID-19 safety protocols and ensure we are consistent in implementation and in compliance."

In another correspondence, McSheehy said the wrestling program was expected to resume at the high school following the winter break.

# Books

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other book.

"Book two: 'Weaverworld' by Clive Barker. Again, I've got one eye on length and depth — I want a book that I can lose myself inside over all those years I'll be eating grubs on the desert island. Barker affected my writing more than almost anyone else and this is my favorite book of his. It's going to take me a few reads to fully understand it and now I have all the time in the world!"

"Book three: 'Moby-Dick.' Same reason but times ten. It's a relatively recent read for me but, wow, talk about depth. I feel like I could read this forever. The language is so fun that I could imagine reading it out loud, even. One-man theatrical productions will go a long way toward amusing myself on a desert island, as long as I keep the volume down so as not to attract predators. Can I order a big hardcover version? That way it can be used as a blunt weapon too."

So that's Daniel's list, and a good one it is.

Unsurprisingly, some books appear again and again on other folks' list. I've devoted past columns to "Moby-Dick" and "Lord of the Rings;" and "Watership

Down" was one of the favorites chosen by Beachcomber reader Stephanie Gogarten.

I can relate to Kraus' point about being terrified of dying before you've read everything you've wanted to. So many books, so little time; and it pains me to think - to know - that there are undoubtedly authors whose work I would love but who I'll never discover.

It's a reason to at least sample everything you can get your hands on - an adage that applies to far more than just books. There's a lovely line in Virginia Woolf's first novel, "The Voyage Out," where one of her characters says, "I make it a rule to try everything... Don't you think it would be very annoying if you tasted ginger for the first time on your death-bed, and found you never liked anything so much?"

Indeed it would. Which books would you take to a desert island, and why? Email me at desertislandbookworm@gmail.com.

Phil Clapham is a retired whale biologist and writer who lives on Maury Island. His new novel "Jack," a romantic comedy narrated by a dog who lives with a professional dominatrix, is available on Amazon under his pseudonym, Phillip Boleyn.

