

'Working during the pandemic has been beyond stressful:' Gov. Inslee met with frontline workers during Spokane visit

The governor also met with health and political leaders.

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SPOKANE, Wash — Gov. Jay Inslee visited Spokane on Thursday amid a recent spike in new cases in the area.

The governor had a series of meetings planned with local elected officials, health leaders and representatives from the region's hospitals.

But the first meeting of the day was with a group called the **Spokane Alliance**. That's a collective of nonprofits, churches, and unions that sometimes get together to promote common goals.



During the meeting, Governor Inslee heard from front line workers on the ground.

"Working during the pandemic has been beyond stressful. We've been going out of our way to overly sanitize and disinfect to protect others when most people aren't taking appropriate measures to take care of themselves. I've been staying updated with the virus, and number of cases has been dramatically increasing, fearing to discover who will get it next," said one teacher at Parkview Early Learning Center. "I worked at a facility where a toddler tested positive and it was very scary. My fear is putting my loved ones in danger. We have no control over how families choose to follow simple health regulations and I go to work on a heavy heart. It's worth it to provide childcare to the kiddos we love."

Attendees also called attention to the disproportionate number of people of color who are contracting the coronavirus.

"Racism is impacting who contracts COVID-19 and who is spared. In Spokane, people of color make up a disproportionate number of the COVID-19 cases and front-line workers who are put at risk on a daily basis," said Ravneet Waraich, a WSU medical student and a member of the Health Equity circle. "Now is the time to address the root cause of these

health inequities and call upon our institutions, administrators, and elected officials to take action and give this public health crisis a name -- racism."

The goal of the meeting was to make sure the governor understands the perspective of the frontline workers on the ground.

"While it's important to hear from the people in government, it's also really important to hear from the community," said Dr. Luis Manriquez, who heads the Health Equity Circle, a member of the Spokane Alliance. "The particulars really matter. So from the particulars of people's stories you can really get a sense of how to address those needs."

Manriquez says he and the rest of the alliance wanted to convey to the governor the concerns of folks like grocery store employees, transit workers, and health care professionals.

"Questions around safety, returning to work, social distancing and masks," he said.

The trip to Spokane marks only the second time since the pandemic began that Inslee has left his Western Washington base of operations. The first was to Yakima, which Inslee called the state's coronavirus epicenter.

So, the fact that he came to Spokane at the same time we're seeing all-time highs in new cases may be a bit concerning to some. But Manriquez says he's not reading into it that way.

"The signal that it sends to me is that the governor is concerned about the entire state, and that it's really valuable to come out to the east side and hear from people out here," he said. "So I look at it as a positive thing."