

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday April 7, 2020.

The Jefferson County Department of Public Health reports there are now 27 local cases of COVID-19. Of these, 18 are designated as in-county exposures while nine are presumed out of county exposures. This is a significant jump and represents nine new cases over the past week.

Of 590 patients tested 426 have come back negative while just 8 are awaiting the results. This low number is attributable to Jefferson Healthcare's need to only test the qualifying symptomatic cases due to a shortage of testing kits.

On Monday, Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Thomas Locke told the County Commissioners echoed the warning from Federal officials, that we will see a surge in cases as soon as this week. He also said that we may see the virus level decrease in the summer, but there could be an uptick of cases in the fall. The good news: Locke said that people who are cured cannot catch the virus again. Subsequent to treatment they can volunteer to help others without a fear of reinfection, Locke said. In the meantime, Locke said the health community is looking to bring the ability for self testing to Jefferson County.

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The Port Townsend City Council held its first virtual meeting on Monday night, with all seven members connecting through a teleconferencing app. And at the conclusion of the 82-minute meeting, Mayor Michelle Sandoval said it went well in its ability to address council business.

The council members adapted well to the new format, although they weren't sure whether they should stand during the virtual pledge of allegiance.

The council passed five resolutions during the online meeting, including the authorization of the Fort Worden Lifelong Learning Center to operate, convert and construct necessary facilities to combat the COVID-19 health crisis. This paves the way for the now-dormant facility to serve as a field hospital, should the anticipated increase in cases materialize.

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Monday's county commissioner meeting, officials reported several measures the county is taking to accommodate the expected influx of COVID-19 cases. This includes charging law enforcement agencies with patrolling the city and county to encourage stay at home and social distancing, working with local grocers, restaurants and their food handlers so they can continue to provide services and ensure social distancing, and overseeing the availability of food from grocery stores, markets and area restaurants.

The fully-activated Department of Emergency Management staff is working on submitting resource requests to the state, overseeing the production and dissemination of facemasks for community use and working with schools, businesses and the area's Neighborhood Preparedness groups, according to a post on the Jefferson County Government Facebook Page.

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In a change of position, health officials are now recommending that people wear masks in public, although Locke said that wearing masks should not replace of social distancing. He recommended that people making

their own masks choose a design that includes a filter, and for people wearing masks for extended periods take extreme care when removing them, and to wash their hands carefully before doing anything else.

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With the postponement or cancellation of several events, it's beginning to feel that Summer in Port Townsend is itself cancelled. Following last week's announcement of the cancellation of Centrum's Festival Season, we learned over the weekend that the 2020 Rhododendron Festival is cancelled, and the the popular THING Festival will wait until August 2121 to produce its second event. Even so, THING representatives declined to say which performers would have appeared at the event.

The Race to Alaska is also endangered. Race Boss Daniel Evans posted in March that he planned to carry on. Evans told KPTZ yesterday there would be a final announcement in early May, but at this point he is leaning toward postponement. In his words, it would be hard to maintain the spirit of the race and still run the race. The race, scheduled to begin at the crack of dawn on June 8, already has 29 teams set to tackle the 750 miles between Port Townsend and Ketchikan, Alaska in non motorized boats.

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This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening,