

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday April 14, 2020.

After a spike in Jefferson County COVID-19 cases last week the numbers are now stable. Only one new case was reported over the weekend, bringing the number of cases to 28. 19 are designated as in-county exposures while 9 are presumed out of county exposures.

Of 685 patients tested 651, have come back negative while nine patients are awaiting the results. This represents a 4.9% positive testing ratio.

During a presentation to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, health officer Dr. Thomas Locke cited a dramatic improvement in acquiring test results. Not so long ago it took as long as two weeks to get the results,; now it's decreased to a few days.

Locke told the commissioners that a self test could be available to county residents in May. This would allow people to test at home, and increase the ability to test people in high risk categories who are asymptomatic.

The first line of defense is the Jefferson Healthcare COVID 19 respiratory nurse contact line. Anyone who feels they are infected should call in and discuss their symptoms to determine whether a test is appropriate. Another option is to call your health care provider. But turning up at the emergency room unannounced is discouraged. A hospital spokesperson said that calls have decreased in the past weeks, indicating that the stay-at-home directives are successful in preventing a widespread infection.

This is substantiated by a report from the Washington Department of Health, stating that social distancing has prevented the breadth of the outbreak in the state's largest counties. Even if this is good news, people are urged to maintain this distance for the foreseeable future.

The nurse contact hotline, 360-344-3094, is open from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.

In response to the growth of COVID-19 cases, the Washington Health Benefit Exchange announced a limited-time special enrollment period for qualified individuals who are currently without insurance.

This special enrollment period (SEP) runs through May 8. It allows uninsured individuals to enroll in health insurance coverage through Washington Healthplanfinder.

Such plans can go into effect as early as May first.

For more information go to the Washington Health Exchange website or contact a local insurance agent who is a certified Health Exchange navigator.

Summer in Port Townsend is essentially cancelled, with the Rhody Festival, Centrum Summer Programs, and the THING! Festival among the casualties. The Race to Alaska is still in limbo, with a final decision as to whether to go ahead due on April 24.

In a normal year, the Port Townsend to Coupeville ferry route would kick into a two-boat service in May. However, this won't happen until at least June 20, as the Washington State Ferries announced it will continue its winter sailing schedule until that date.

The system is automatically cancelling long term reservations based on the Spring schedule. It has also cancelled international service to and from Sidney, British Columbia, until June 21 at the earliest.

In all likelihood the system will be able to accommodate all passengers due to a general decline in ridership.

Also in a normal year, your 2019 tax return would be due tomorrow. But in March the IRS extended that deadline to July 15. Which really wasn't necessary, as we've had plenty of time to fill out our tax forms during the past month.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5 PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at [kptz dot org](http://kptz.org).

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today's news. Thank you for listening to KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend.