

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, December 3, 2020.

Big news in Jefferson County yesterday, as no new cases of COVID-19 were reported, bucking the trend of the last few weeks. We are now holding at 170 cases, with 68 results pending.

For the latest numbers, including gender breakdown and cumulative percentages, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1466/Case-Information>) or the Jefferson County Government Facebook page.

In a statement issued yesterday, Jefferson County Health Officer Dr Tom Locke predicted that local COVID-19 exposure risk is likely to increase over the next three to four months, but predicted that once vaccines are deployed and winter gives way to spring and summer, the long health emergency will finally be over.

Locke said that people are tired of having their lives disrupted and willing to take more and more risk. This will come to a head as we enter the holiday season. He writes, "ultimately it comes down to balancing risk with benefit. Is going to a social event worth the risk? Is having a family gathering or out-of-town visitors worth the risk? My advice is to try forego as much preventable risk as possible, including club meetings, social events, large gatherings, non-essential travel and the like."

Locke said we are entering the third wave of the pandemic, which will almost certainly be worse than anything we have experienced so far.

You can now use your smartphone to track instances of COVID-19. Yesterday Governor Jay Inslee announced a new exposure notification tool, WNotify. The free service works with Apple and Android phones. Phones equipped with the service use Bluetooth technology to exchange random codes with the phones of other users they are near. It does this without revealing a user's identity or location. Users who test positive for COVID-19 can enter a verification code provided by public health into WA Notify, so that other users who have been near them within the last 14 days can be anonymously alerted and take appropriate action.

According to a press release, digital exposure notification systems could reduce infections by 8 percent and deaths by approximately 6 percent, effectively complementing traditional contact tracing.

The pandemic has increased the stress of many supervisory jobs, none more so than the superintendent of schools. Primary and secondary education now experience an unprecedented level of chaos, aggravated by fluctuations in virus numbers and switches between classroom and virtual learning.

Amid this, both the Port Townsend and Chimacum School Districts are in the unenviable position of a superintendent search. In Port Townsend, this is the fourth such search in the last ten years. John Polm, who had served for four years, left the district in June, at which time the board elevated assistant superintendent Sandra Gessner Crabtree to the role of interim superintendent for the current school year.

David Engle, who was Polm's predecessor in Port Townsend, is serving as Chimacum's interim superintendent after Rick Thompson's contract was not renewed this year.

The districts hired a single search firm to recruit for both positions. Both districts hope to interview candidates in January, select finalists for followup interviews in February, and select a finalist later that month. The new superintendents then will be in place for the next school year, when a whole new set of challenges will emerge.

Local small businesses are suffering, with the Highway 20 Roadhouse the latest to announce its closure until further notice. Many others are struggling, but there is some hope brought about by the third round of Working Washington Small Business emergency assistance grants, which opened this week.

Those qualifying include small businesses with annual revenues of \$5 million or less in 2019 in sectors experiencing the most impacts, including full-service restaurants, fitness centers, and music and event venues. Certain non-profits are also eligible if their primary business falls into a similar high impact category.

A maximum award is \$20K and covers expenses and costs incurred due to COVID-19 and that were necessary to continue business operations. Priority will be given to applications received by December 10.

For more information go to <http://startup.choosewashingtonstate.com/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.