

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, February 9, 2021.

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While we wait for a possible uptick in COVID-19 numbers from Super Bowl parties, the county added seven new cases this week for a total of 322. There are 18 active cases now in isolation, and ten people awaiting results. During his weekly briefing to the Jefferson County Commissioners, Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke said that our case rates are climbing, with a two week case rate of 125 per 100,000 which is up from 107.

Locke said the cases are driven by clusters, including one large outbreak that involved 23 people. So over half the cases were all in one non-public setting. This is good news, sort of. Such clusters have less community spread potential and, in some ways, reflect the fact that our containment efforts are successful. And a number of the positive cases are people who test positive in quarantine, identifying and isolating cases before they become infectious.

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Locke reported that 5,056 doses have been administered so far by Jefferson Healthcare with an additional 890 by local pharmacies. The process continues, but mostly for the second dose of the two-stage Pfizer vaccine. Locke said the state is predicting that vaccine supplies will be extremely limited in February and through most of March but will open up in late March or April.

In a statement last week, Jefferson Healthcare CEO Mike Glenn said the hospital has not received any additional first dose vaccines, resulting in a limited ability to schedule new patient vaccinations. Some jurisdictions are using vaccine designated for the second dose to inoculate new patients and many experts – including Dr. Anthony Fauci-have said that it is safe to defer the administration of second doses. But Jefferson County has rejected this idea, making sure there is enough on hand for all second doses before scheduling new injections.

Glenn acknowledged how frustrating this is for patients, writing “I will not pretend that our frustration is on the level of yours, but will say we are extremely frustrated with the vaccine supply process. We will continue to hound all possible vaccine sources, and commit to running the vaccination center seven days a week as soon as the vaccine is available.”

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Indoor dining at restaurants is currently forbidden, but a few local restaurants have been able to take advantage of an exception that allows for so-called open air seating. According to these rules, if a restaurant has roll-up doors or large windows that can be opened to allow for significant outside air ventilation inside the dining room, it can seat customers indoors at 25 percent capacity. But it isn't quite that easy. Restaurants that pursue this option must use a CO2 monitor to track air flow in the dining room. If levels exceed 450 parts per million (ppm) for 15 minutes, diners must be relocated to an open-air seating area that meets the state's requirements.

In Port Townsend, Tommyknockers, Sirens and Quench are among those now operating under the open air rules. Tommyknockers co-owner Thomas Skipper said he is fortunate that his building has a back door that facilitates air flow, unlike many other local restaurants. The drawback is that the so called inside section is as cold as the outside by the end of the day.

At Sirens, much of the upstairs section is open. Tables are sectioned off, and blankets are available for anyone who wants to cut the chill.

The whole open air dining thing is weather sensitive and could be less of a hardship once spring rolls around. Unless there is a lot of rain, then all bets are off.

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This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.