

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with with local news and commentary for Thursday, May 22, 2021.

COVID-19 cases in Jefferson County are slowing down, with 26 cases reported in May. This compares with 45 new cases in April. May reports have been sporadic, with a flurry of cases followed by several days with no reports at all. Jefferson County's case total now stands at 416, with 31 people now awaiting test results.

Vaccinations are now readily available, and those needing a shot can walk into the Jefferson Healthcare Express Clinic, adjacent to the hospital's north entrance, without an appointment to receive the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

The Department of Emergency Management, together with Jefferson County Public Health, will staff a vaccine clinic at the Farmer's Market on Tyler Street from 9am to 1pm this Saturday. The vaccine at this clinic will also be Johnson & Johnson. Those 18 and older are eligible for this vaccine. Appointments are preferred but walk-ins are accepted. For appointments or information about vaccine activity in the county call 360-344-9791.

Jefferson County is in the first third of a code compliance amnesty program, meant to assist property owners eradicate code violations without fines. The program began May first and expires August first. The Jefferson County Department of Community Development (DCD) has already sent letters to known code violators, inviting them to meet with the agency to develop a mitigation process. Those who have code violations of which the county is unaware are also invited in.

Debra Murdock, who is running the program, said in a video posted to the Jefferson County Facebook page that the county has a history of code non compliance, along with a lack of understanding as to what requires a permit and what does not. For example, a stable that houses animals and feed does not require a permit. But this would change should it turn into a shop that is regularly occupied by people. The most common violations are building structures like ADUs without permits, and clearing land that may have stormwater issues. For this reason, people are urged to contact the DCD before any large-scale clearing project to determine if the property is affected.

Once a property owner seeks compliance the DCD will work with them to help meet their goals while staying within code boundaries. The process must begin before August first. Once the process starts the property owner will have 90 days to complete the project, although the deadline will be shorter for those projects with public health implications. In the video, District 3 County Commissioner Greg Brotherton said the program's goal is to remove the barriers for code compliance, with the ultimate goal of increasing the level of public safety. There is always a way to accomplish code compliance while meeting the property owner's individual needs, Brotherton said. There is no way to determine how many code violations exist in the county, as they generally remain in place unless someone – like a neighbor – complains. To participate in the program contact Debra Murdock, (360) 379-4462 or email amnesty@co.jefferson.wa.us.

The recent relaxed masking guidelines shouldn't change our behavior too much. This according to Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke, who has kept our own local mask mandate in place. The purpose of the mandate, he said, is to encourage people to keep wearing masks in order to prevent unvaccinated people from congregating in indoor public places. There is still enough COVID-19 around that that will drive transmission,

and could risk either slowing down the rate of decline of COVID-19 or even stall the process altogether. Additionally, there isn't any practical way for businesses to verify the vaccination status for each customer. So although we started to wear masks to protect other people, these days we do so because we don't trust them.

Kroger, which owns QFC, recently eased its mask requirements for shoppers, but the Port Townsend store is still requiring them. So that lady I saw yesterday was out of compliance. You know who you are.

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.