

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Karen Anderson, sitting in for Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, July 29, 2021.

The Kitsap *Sun* recently reported a story about a letter sponsored by the Washington Sheriff's Association and signed by 37 of the state's sheriffs, swearing to "steadfastly protect" the second amendment and preserve the right to bear arms throughout the state. This is necessary because these rights are threatened by new gun restrictions, and the group's spokesperson said the letter is meant to circumvent these restrictions. But Jefferson County Sheriff Joe Nole, who signed the letter, has a different interpretation. He told KPTZ that he signed the letter in order to acknowledge to the public "...the oath I took as Sheriff to support the Constitution of the United States and enforce the laws of the State of Washington and the ordinances of Jefferson County. As you well know the Second Amendment is a part of the Constitution and I support it as well as all of the amendments." But he does not view the letter, or the intent of the letter, as conveying opposition to future gun control measures. He would not necessarily be opposed to legal, constitutional, and meaningful gun control measures that may present themselves in the future. He believes the Constitution is – and always has been – a living document that can change by the will of the people. This is demonstrated by the 27 amendments contained within it. And his role as Sheriff is to enforce the law whether he agrees with it or not.

COVID-19 cases are approaching the 500 mark in Jefferson County. As of Wednesday afternoon there were 497 cases on record. 23 active cases are in isolation and 39 people are awaiting results. Newly appointed Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry on Monday told the County Board Commissioners there is a significant rise in COVID-19 cases in Washington State. Cases are up 133% and hospitalizations are at 10%. Because of this uptick in cases, Berry recommended a return to masking, regardless of vaccination status. "Any place where you are going to be spending time around people and you don't know their vaccine status, we recommend masking up." She mentioned the office, grocery stores, movie theaters, and churches as examples. "This [uptick] is really driven by the Delta variant," Berry said. "We have not seen Delta variants – or at least not diagnosed yet locally – but we certainly anticipate that it's likely here and just hasn't been caught yet."

Jefferson is up to 497 cases, or 72 per 100,000. Berry reported the newest cases are being driven by unvaccinated people in Jefferson County, mostly gathering indoors, at social gatherings, and traveling. Jefferson has a 66% fully vaccinated rate; with those who are 12 and older, the rate climbs to 71%. Vaccinations are available at Jefferson Health Care and the Safeway, QFC, and Tri-Area Pharmacies. "The key message I want folks to know is that we're seeing a dramatic rise in cases. If you haven't gotten vaccinated yet, now is really the time to do it," Berry said.

So to be safe, and protect our local youngsters who are too young to be vaccinated, you should probably choose to wear a mask. But that choice could be removed or modified. One alternative for those businesses that do not want to require masks indoors would be to verify the vaccine status of all those entering and require masking of those who are unvaccinated. This is of particular importance in settings like grocery or retail stores, churches, government buildings, and theaters – to ensure that all unvaccinated people are masked in those settings and as an extra precautionary measure for all.

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 Karen Anderson. Thank you for listening.