

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Simon Jaynes with local news for September 9, 2021.

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Seven new COVID-19 deaths of North Olympic Peninsula residents were confirmed on Wednesday, September 8, raising the total number of COVID-19 deaths in the area to 42. On Wednesday Jefferson County added 18 new COVID-19 cases while Clallam County added 58 new cases for a total of 76 new cases in one day according to county public health data.

The surge in COVID-19 case rates for Jefferson and Clallam counties in the past two weeks has put health officials in the region on high alert. With cases rising, each day brings more signs of the massive burden which local health care systems are experiencing. This sentiment was echoed throughout Tuesday's Board of County Commissioners meeting which featured comments from Dr. Allison Berry, Dr. Joe Mattern, Jefferson Healthcare CEO Mike Glenn, and Department of Emergency Management Director Willie Bence. Bence wrapped up his address to the BOCC with the following appeal: "If you are a retired physician, a retired nurse, if you have a medical background of some sort and you think you might be able to help out, please do contact us.... whether it's to give vaccine doses or actually work to provide care, we want to make sure those resources are potentially available."

This was just one of several pleas for public help and accountability in a meeting where Dr. Berry described the spread of the virus as a "wildfire" and Mike Glenn added that the current situation "is by far the worst it has been at Jefferson Healthcare." Bence highlighted two upcoming vaccine clinics for immunocompromised individuals in Jefferson county – one this Saturday at Chemicum School from nine to noon, and one the following Saturday, September 18, at Blue Heron Middle school, from nine to noon. He addressed certain target dates of the Biden administration such as September 20, as a date to begin administering 3rd booster doses to the general population, and described it as "very unlikely" that they would be approved in time for that date. In regards to individuals who fall under the statewide vaccine mandate for certain sectors, such as state and healthcare workers, Bence said The Department of Emergency Management will be offering clinics as well as support in finding appointments for these people, who are now at an ever greater risk of not meeting the October 18 deadline.

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Tuesday of this week marked a return to in-person schooling for most grade levels within the Port Townsend School District, and despite the fact that it is only day three of the school year, District Superintendent Linda Rosenbury took the time to talk through a few of the challenges and highlights of this moment and what they might mean to the students and parents in the community. In terms of COVID-19 preparedness, mask wearing is required indoors and sometimes outdoors where young children will be playing in close quarters during recess. Students at Salish Coast Elementary school have also moved to outdoor eating with six-foot distancing between them.

Rosenbury pointed out that one positive COVID-19 case had been discovered within the high school population over the weekend, and she used that as an example of the way their protocols are designed to function. As a district, she says, they have put in place rapid antigen testing, and this allows them to invite in anyone who may have been exposed and have a result within 15 minutes. There were no known transmissions as a result of the case from the high school and Rosenbury said she feels "confident" in the tools they have at their disposal, as they have been equipping the district over the summer with resources to do its own testing. She also highlighted the progress the district is making toward having teachers vaccinated by October 18, saying that they are ahead of other districts in verifying vaccinations, as well as in requiring all volunteers to be vaccinated before entering

the building. According to Rosenbury, there has been “no staff loss” district-wide as a result of the vaccination requirements. She does acknowledge that there are a “handful” of teachers who have received a religious exemption from the vaccination mandate, and that under health department guidance those individuals are receiving weekly testing and must wear an N-95 mask. Individuals with a religious exemption are also entitled to confidentiality under state guidance.

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And that’s it for today’s local news. 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](mailto:news@kptz.org). I’m Simon Jaynes. Thanks for listening.