

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Simon Jaynes with local news for September 30, 2021.

It was a blustery night last night in East Jefferson County with gale warnings in effect in Admiralty Inlet and the Salish Sea until early this morning. Rain was heavy at times, and while it may ease as the afternoon wears on, we are likely to see showers lingering into the evening. As this cold front passes, an area of high pressure will begin to move into the area and may very well give Western Washington a dry weekend. Expect high temperatures to be in the upper 50s in the lowlands and 40s to 50s in the mountains. For those seeking blue skies, the clearest skies are expected to be on Friday.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 5 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 993. We have a 2-week case rate of 275 per 100,000 and there are currently 46 active cases in isolation. In her weekly briefing to the Board of County Commissioners, Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry pointed out that both Jefferson and Clallam counties are leading the way in the Puget Sound area with some of the largest decreases in COVID-19 cases, and hospitalizations. Our current case rate of 275/100,000 is down 41% in the last week while Clallam is down 35%.

Dr Berry continued to stress the importance of getting people vaccinated. The vaccines, she said, while having some decrease in efficacy with the rise of the Delta variant, are still incredibly effective at preventing infection altogether. Quite simply, if you are vaccinated, you're less likely to have the virus, which means you can't give it to other people. And then, even if you are unlikely enough to get one of those breakthrough infections, according to Dr. Berry, you have lower amounts of viable virus that you can transmit to other people, and you also are infectious for a shorter period of time – three days as opposed to 10. "All those things come together to make you less likely to transmit the virus," said Dr. Berry.

On September 28, the Washington State Department of Corrections put out a COVID-19 bulletin detailing the case counts for various facilities around the state. It is worth noting from a regional perspective, that on a statewide list of the 6 correctional facilities experiencing serious outbreaks, 4 of those prisons are on the Olympic Peninsula: Olympic Corrections in Forks and Stafford Creek in Aberdeen report limited area outbreaks, and Washington Corrections Center in Shelton and Clallam Bay Corrections in Clallam Bay report as the only two in the state with facility-wide outbreaks. Clallam Bay, a facility that houses only 648 inmates, reported 84 positive COVID-19 cases in the last 30 days. Washington Corrections Center houses 1600 inmates and they have had 69 positive cases in the last 30 days and 1090 cases confirmed to date. By any quick analysis these numbers would appear to be indicative of a system at crisis level.

Certainly, a deeper dive needs to be done into the research, but it is hard to miss the stark contrast between reports of case rates dropping throughout the general population all along the west coast. Cases are plateauing in Washington State, with local counties leading the way with dramatic drops, while Washington's prison system ranks solidly in the bottom half of the nation with the 21st highest COVID-19 case percentage among incarcerated individuals.

Today, September 30, was originally to be the final day of Governor Jay Inslee's Eviction Moratorium Bridge Program when it was enacted on June 24 of this year. Last Friday however, the Governor did update the proclamation by extending it through 11:59pm on October 31, to allow more time for local jurisdictions to distribute funding for rental assistance. It is important to note that while this provides an additional month for some tenants to seek assistance if they are experiencing hardship, time is certainly running short.

In Jefferson County, our Superior Court has adopted the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program, which is designed to help landlords and tenants resolve matters together, rather than engaging in official eviction proceedings through the court. There are a number of local resources designed to support renters and landlords through this complicated process. Anyone feeling the pressure of eviction in this coming month should immediately seek help. Olympic Community Action Programs (OlyCAP) is administering federal and state rent assistance through a Treasury program called T-RAP and you can find out how to apply at www.olycap.org/housing-services/. People can also visit the Peninsula Dispute Resolution Center at <https://pdrc.org/erpp/> as well as check in at <https://housingsolutionsnetwork.org/stay-housed/> for lots of information on eviction prevention.

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. I'm Simon Jaynes. Stay safe out there, thanks for listening, and have a great day.