

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Steve Evans, and this is the local news for Thursday, October 14, 2021.

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Jefferson County Public Health reported two more new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings the total County case count, since tabulation began March 2, 2020, up to 1,056. According to the Public Health website, more than 74% of those cases have been among unvaccinated individuals or those not fully vaccinated. There have been sixteen deaths in the county due to COVID-19, and 65 cases requiring hospitalization. Only one Jefferson County resident was still in hospital as of yesterday, however, the wave of severe cases that threatened to overwhelm Jefferson Healthcare a few weeks ago having significantly subsided. At this point, some 73% of Jefferson County residents have initiated vaccination, and 69.7% are fully vaccinated, according to the website.

Meanwhile, some Clallam County residents – who view COVID-19 control measures as a violation of civil liberties rather than as mere safety protocols like speed limits or seat belts – yesterday challenged before the state Board of Health the authority of Jefferson and Clallam County Public Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry to issue orders for bars and restaurants to require proof of vaccination before entry for indoor drinking and dining, as she did on September 2. In the complaint initially filed September 16, Patricia Monson and an unidentified Clallam County employee alleged Berry failed to follow statutory requirements to hold public hearings before issuing the mandate, thus depriving people of their “due process rights,” according to an article in Wednesday’s *Peninsula Daily News*. Berry was quoted in the PDN as calling the matter a “simple misunderstanding. They don’t understand the role of the health officer. They think we have to have a formal vote for each health officer action, and that’s just not the way it works.” Berry noted that the order appears to have worked. Cases were surging in both counties in the weeks prior to the vaccination proof mandate. “About two weeks after the order, we saw a 45% drop in cases and a commensurate drop in the number hospitalized,” she said. Like many public health officers around the nation – particularly female health officers – Berry has received multiple death threats as a result of her efforts to quell the pandemic locally.

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In a trend that is wreaking havoc in every sector of the economy, nearly 3% of the American labor force quit their jobs in August amid heightened fear of the highly contagious delta variant of COVID-19 that was surging through the country. According to an Associated Press article, some 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs that month, up from four million the month before, and the highest number recorded by the Labor Department since at least December, 2000. Particularly hard-hit by labor attrition has been the Washington State Ferry system, which announced Friday that 7 of its 10 routes are operating at diminished capacity due to chronic and steadily worsening crew shortages. The shortages have forced the system to reduce boats and runs, with many routes running at half capacity. Some 140 sailings were canceled on Friday alone, in what the ferry agency called “a rough service day due to lack of crew.” The Port Townsend-Coupeville route, which never regained its second ferry for the summer runs, is not alone. The Seattle routes to Bainbridge and Bremerton, along with the Edmonds-Kingston, the Mukilteo-Clinton, the Fauntleroy-Vashon-Southworth triangle, and San Juan routes are also all running at about half capacity. A spokesperson for the agency cited various factors as contributing to the staffing crisis, including COVID-19 outbreaks, an aging and retiring work force, and difficulty in recruiting newcomers into the maritime industry. In addition, COVID-19 restrictions have hampered training schedules.

Ferry officials are eyeing nervously the impending October 18 deadline for ferry workers to be vaccinated, and note that a few dozen of those workers have joined a pending lawsuit by state troopers and other public employees against the mandate. Some of these may intend to quit. And an aging and retiring workforce, with people intending to quit soon cashing in on sick leave and vacation, were also cited as contributing to the

problem. The agency has moved from once-a-year hiring to continuous recruiting to try to close the gap, so if you've considered a maritime career, now would be a good time to apply.

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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). This is Steve Evans for KPTZ Community Radio News. Thank you for listening.