

Good afternoon. You are listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Simon Jaynes with local news for December 30, 2021.

Port Townsend, and most of Western Washington remain in the grip of cold and icy temperatures today. The cold front that has been stalled over our region since last weekend is not quite done with us yet, as chilly evening temperatures will remain below freezing tonight and tomorrow a mostly sunny day is predicted, with a highs only near 30. Most weather models have Saturday, New Year's Day as our first relief from these bitter temperatures, as the region finally breaks loose from the Fraser Outflow, which has been spewing arctic air over the Peninsula since Christmas. We can expect a more typical coastal system bringing wetter, slightly warmer air into the region by early next week. As the ice and snow melts everyone should continue to use caution out there on the roads because driving conditions will likely worsen for at least a day or two.

Port Townsend Schools return from Winter break on Monday, January 3 and any parents keeping an eye on the weather, wondering about possible delays can stay informed through the District's website, <https://www.ptschools.org/>, as well as the district Facebook page. Anyone needing immediate information regarding closures can call 360-379-4500 and enter extension 4587.

Adventure seekers young and old looking to maximize their fun in in the snow over the next few days should keep the local recreation area at Hurricane Ridge in mind. The Winter Sports Center, which operates the ski and snowboard area at Hurricane Ridge announced that the rope tow and tube runs are open daily through Sunday, weather permitting. The road is scheduled to be open from 9am to 4pm, with hours dependent upon weather conditions. Motorists are required to carry chains.

A Washington DOT ferry alert for today, December 30 – due to tidal currents, the 3:30pm and 5:15pm sailings from Port Townsend and the 4:15pm and 6pm sailings from Coupeville are cancelled. Your alternate routes are Edmonds/Kingston and Mukilteo/Clinton. DOT also wants to remind drivers to plan for three consecutive nights when the State Route 104 Hood Canal Bridge will be closed to all travelers. The dates and times for these closures are: January 4, 5, and 6 from 11pm to 4am. Details can be found through a search of the Washington DOT website or by going to <https://wsdot.com/travel/real-time/hoodcanalbridgestatus>.

Jefferson County Public Health had not updated its daily Covid-19 case information as of this morning, but we know the County's case rate has increased in the past week, and is now at 214 per 100,000. For those interested, case information is available at the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=845>). And due to the surge in cases across our region, driven primarily by the omicron variant, the health department has published a helpful testing flowchart to direct people through the proper actions to take in case they have had a possible exposure or are feeling symptoms. Go to: <https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/DocumentCenter/View/12518/Testing-Flowchart>

Our already over-taxed healthcare systems on the Olympic peninsula are feeling the pinch even harder, as staff members continue to contract COVID-19 in the form of breakthrough cases of vaccinated workers. Though numbers were not available for Jefferson Healthcare as of today, Olympic Medical Center which operates

facilities in Sequim and Port Angeles has 127 employees off work because of COVID-19, either because they are infected or because they were exposed to a person who had tested positive for the virus. “It’s fair to say at least 10% of our workforce is impacted by one of those categories,” said Jennifer Burkhardt, chief human resources officer for OMC. “We hit our peak with the delta variant over Labor Day weekend, and we had our peak, at least so far, with the omicron variant on Christmas Eve,” she added. Dr. Allison Berry, health officer for Clallam and Jefferson counties, said, “We are really seeing the power of the omicron surge with breakthrough cases in our staff from work and at home.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised a shorter quarantine period on Monday. That could affect how long employees are away from work. “We are seeing a shortage of capacity in hospitals across the state, particularly in the ICU department,” Burkhardt said. Olympic Medical Center currently has more than 250 open positions – “an all-time record,” Burkhardt said – and while worker fatigue is a real thing, the OMC’s attrition rate has stayed the same as it was before the pandemic. “I do think there’s a lot of health care worker fatigue,” she said. “There’s no question that our staff is really struggling. But our attrition numbers don’t suggest that people are leaving the workforce in any greater numbers than they had previously.”

Berry continues to urge residents to get vaccinated to avoid overtaxing the health care system and an already strained hospital staff. “People really should get vaccinated if they haven’t already and get a booster to best counter this variant,” she said.

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. Thanks for listening and have a great day.