

Good afternoon. You are listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Simon Jaynes with local news for January 6, 2022.

Schools on the Peninsula went back to class on Monday, navigating icy roads, melting snow, and power outages along the way. But by far their most concerning adversary is the surge of post-holiday COVID-19 cases across the region.

I spoke with Port Townsend School District Superintendent Dr. Linda Rosenbury yesterday, about what the staff and students in the district can expect to face heading into the new year. She acknowledged that while many of the challenges will be familiar ones, some may require new solutions and new levels of vigilance. "It's been an intense start to the year for educators and students and families, with the increase in cases related to the Omicron Variant," Rosenbury said. She highlighted the district's good fortune to have access to a lot of rapid tests and to team members focused on identifying cases, tracing those cases and notifying family members. She noted as well, "We have a lot of masks on hand, and that is good because we have heard recently that cloth masks are not as effective against the variant."

When asked if the district might move to mandate specific mask-types, Rosenbury replied, "We will continue our basic mask mandate, and have masks on hand, and encourage people to upgrade their masks, but we are not looking at a new mandate at this time." According to the Superintendent, the district has tested over 300 people this week, and there have been 7 total positive cases thus far. This number includes totals for both students and staff. For privacy reasons Rosenbury said she cannot make the distinction between student and staff test results but she added, "As you can imagine there's a little of each."

Port Townsend Schools are currently up and running with all in-person programs at full capacity, but they are meanwhile preparing for the coming months where many health models predict that a large portion of teachers will catch the virus. And although the CDC recently made the recommendation for the general public to isolate for 5 days as opposed to 10, that guidance is not yet approved by the Washington State Department of Health for K-12 teachers and students. Dr. Rosenbury said she is looking at this Friday, when the Department of Health for Washington will hopefully announce new K-12 guidelines that will include a reduction in isolation and quarantine time from 10 to 5 days.

She acknowledges that with the challenges ahead, there was some discussion about if it would be safer to move to virtual instruction, but, she says, "we learned from our time over the past two years that the virtual and fully remote experience is just not the same for most of our students, so we are following the cue of our state leaders and our school board and doing everything we can to remain in person." Rosenbury added, "Understandably there are people who are worried about being in person... and we do have a wholly online program for grades 1-12. There is an information session next week about this and we will be accepting new students for online learning at the semester break later this month." Information about this program and all other up to the moment school district information can be found at [ptschools.org](https://ptschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=155011&pageId=50246500)

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Jefferson County Public Health reported 28 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1636. Vaccination Clinics are being offered this coming Saturday January 8 at Chimacum High School and the following Saturday January 15 at Quilcene High School. Both will have a morning clinic for children and an afternoon clinic for adults needing 1st, 2nd or Booster doses of the Moderna vaccine. You can find info and make reservations for these clinics through

jeffersoncountypublichealth.org (<https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=857>).

Anyone curious about what to do in case of symptoms or a positive test result, can find a helpful testing flowchart at <https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1429/COVID-19>.

50 miles of US HWY 101 between Hoodsport in Mason County and State Route 104 in Jefferson County remains closed to through travelers after heavy snow Sunday evening brought down powerlines and trees on the highway. Local access is allowed in and around the Quilcene and Brinnon areas, but through traffic looking to travel north or south from these communities will be turned back. Because of the terrain, winter conditions, and the lack of space for vehicles to turn around, the closure points will remain in place until utility crews finish repairs. Travelers are advised to use State Route 3 and SR 104 around the closure. If weather permits, crews expect to reopen this closed section by the end of today, Jan. 6. Travelers can get real time information about highway conditions via the WSDOT app and WSDOT webpage (<https://wsdot.com/travel/real-time/alerts/road/101/Shelton/Sequim>).

The Jefferson County Board of Commissioners is currently inviting applications for projects to enhance the county's open spaces. The Conservation Futures Program helps protect wildlife habitat, timber lands, visual buffers, and open space lands linked to parks and cultural historic sites. Projects must provide permanent protection of open space lands through the acquisition of real property or development rights, or involve operations costs for properties acquired with the Conservation Fund. In the 2022 funding cycle, approximately \$220,000 is available to projects. Workshops to explain the details of the Conservation Futures Program to groups and interested citizens are available by request throughout the year. You can visit the Conservation Futures web page by following a link in the transcript to this broadcast, under "News" at kptz.org or by simply searching the Jefferson County website (<https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/560/Conservation-Futures-Program>).

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.