

Hello world, you are listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burkewith local news for January 25, 2022.

There was a fire at the Port Townsend Paper mill this weekend. According to *The Peninsula Daily News*: East Jefferson Fire and Rescue were called to the mill at 2:40pm, Saturday, after a blaze began in an enclosed wood-chip conveyor belt which had spread to the sixth floor of the mill. Fire district spokesperson Phyllis Speser said the fire of the conveyor belt was put out by 3:16 pm, and the sixth floor fire at 3:31 pm. No one was hurt in the fire. As of Sunday the cause was still under investigation. Lending an assist were crews from Port Ludlow Fire and Rescue, Clallam County Fire District 3, Quilcene Fire Rescue and the Poulsbo Fire Department.

Jefferson County Public Health officer Dr. Alison Berry, and Department of Emergency Management Director Willy Bence spoke yesterday about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it continues to affect life in Jefferson and Clallam Counties. Dr. Berry said that cases are at their peak here in Jefferson County, and cases in the Northeastern part of the US are starting to drop rapidly, with a continuing rise in cases in the Midwest and South, and in the West we have reached our peak. Western Washington cases have plateaued, however eastern Washington is still seeing a rise in cases. Dr. Berry said "In Jefferson County, our current case totals were up to 2,371 cases,...a case rate of 1,398 per hundred thousand, just slightly down from where we were last week." Shesaid that was still a very very high rate of infection but we should likely see cases "decrease relatively soon." Four people are currently hospitalized for a total of 96 cases since this began, and 22 deaths. There is one long-term care facility with three positive residents, and further testing has revealed no cases among the staff of that facility.

In Clallam County, the case rate is 2,022 per hundred thousand, in the past two weeks. She admits these ratios might be confusing but that rate in Clallam County accounts for more than a hundred new cases a day. If we see that rate drop below a hundred, then we'll see that number drop lower and lower. She said if we imagine we are at the top of a mountain peak, that we still need to climb down the either side, and the way to do that is to continue to do the things that we've been very good at in Jefferson County since the pandemic began: Wear a well fitting mask, avoid large crowds, especially indoors, get vaccinated, boosted, and if you can, only go into indoor spaces that are well ventilated.

There is still "a ton of Covid circulating in our community", Dr. Berry said, and as hospitalizations and deaths trail the infection numbers, we will still see significant strain on our Hospitals and Urgent care facilities in the coming weeks. There is still a critical shortage of tests. Those who ordered tests from the Federal or State Government are not likely to see those delivered for another week or two, and we are still in this surge. So, Dr. Berry advised that if you are sick, and even if you think it's just a cold, but you can't access a test, then stay home until you are better to avoid giving a potential COVID-19 case to someone else. Stay home for FIVE days from when your symptoms started, or stay home for five days if you've been exposed, but can't access a test and you are unboosted. If you've been exposed to someone, and you are boosted, if you have no symptoms you can continue to work. If you have a positive test, then stay home for ten days after symptoms start. There were questions about masks and she stressed that we should wear an N 95mask if possible and if you wear a cloth mask and surgical mask or other more filtering mask together, that the mask that has the best ability to filter the virus is next to your face and the cloth mask on the outside. Dr. Berry said, "Airflow is key. Masking is still key. Vaccination is still key. If you do all three of those, you really can dramatically reduce your risk of spread." She emphasized that we will see a dramatic drop in cases in the next month and we might be able to lift many restrictions in Mid-March, but that we need to stay the course now to avoid prolonging this surge, as all our resources are strained at this point.

The Hood Canal Bridge on SR 104 will be closed overnight to vehicular travel this week, Tuesday through Thursday nights at 11 pm for needed repairs to the bridge. There were several closures previously scheduled but due to weather conditions and staffing issues related to the pandemic, many of those closures were cancelled. According to *The Peninsula Daily News*, the closures are likely to happen this week, because the weather is calmer. Crews are replacing rubber bumpers to some of the links between sections of the bridge. If all goes as planned, the span will close this week to all traffic from 11pm Tuesday to 4am Wednesday; 11pm Wednesday until 4am Thursday, and 11pm Thursday to 4am Friday. The work and associated closures are weather-dependent and could still be rescheduled. Any questions about the bridge closures, and the ferry schedules can be answered by going to the Washington Department of Transportation Website: <https://wsdot.wa.gov/> or by looking at the real time travel data map at <https://wsdot.wa.gov/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five PM Monday through Thursday and at noon on Friday and Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. I am Jim Burke. Thank you for listening.