

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for February 15, 2022.

Dr. Allison Berry gave a COVID-19 update to the County Board of Commissioners and KPTZ listeners yesterday, and she answered some questions. "We are seeing improvement nationwide in COVID-19 case rates and hospitalizations. We are also starting to see a downturn in deaths nationwide as well. But we are still seeing just under 2500 Americans die every day from COVID-19," she said. In Washington State we got our peaks (in cases) later, so we are seeing our cases decrease here later as well. We are seeing a 30% decrease in cases in the last week in Washington State – "Very hopeful," she said, "both on the east side and the west side of the mountains." She stressed that we are still at "very high rates of transmission."

By the numbers: About 2500 cases per hundred thousand statewide and falling, but still four times higher than any previous surge.

2,874 cases so far in Jefferson County, and the case rate is down to 743 per hundred thousand, a significant drop from last week. 5 people are currently hospitalized, and we've had 26 deaths. The most recent death was a person who was 90 and unvaccinated.

In Clallam County, the rate is 1,224 per hundred thousand, significantly down from the peak rate which was twice that. Kitsap County has a case rate of 2,213 per hundred thousand.

"We do anticipate that these case rates will continue to decrease over February and March. However," Dr. Berry said, "that is not guaranteed to happen if we change our other mitigation measures." The modeling of those cases coming down over the next six weeks are based on our current mitigations. She reminded everyone, "We do anticipate better days are ahead of us very soon." But "If we loosen up our mitigation measures now, we could see a prolonging of this surge." Vaccination mandates are likely be lifted in March, and the mask mandates in late March or early April.

Pfizer pulled their data on vaccines for children under five, not because they were harmful, but because they weren't effective at creating "immunogenicity." (you can look it up!)

She also answered several questions from listeners, including debunking persistent myths around the vaccine and myocarditis in young men: COVID-19 is far more likely to cause far worse cases of myocarditis and cause other things like blood clots and other health issues.

Another question was about masks in schools, as someone's out of state relatives had claimed they had no COVID-19 outbreaks after masks were discarded. She said there were some numbers from Maricopa County in Arizona, where some schools were masking and some weren't, and among the schools that were not using masks, the likelihood of COVID-19 outbreaks was more than three and a half times greater. She mentioned vaccines again and said the least vaccinated group in Jefferson County is children, and that if mitigations in the community as a whole were ongoing, there would be little worry about outbreaks in schools. The overall numbers need to be really low in the community for there to be low likelihood of outbreaks in schools.

Ivermectin was studied as a COVID-19 treatment and found to be ineffective against COVID-19, but still works on parasitic infections in livestock and in humans when used as directed.

Next week is President's Day, so next week's briefing will be on Tuesday morning, February 22.

The Jefferson County Commissioners will hold a public hearing later this month as they consider regulations to ban fireworks county wide. Officials, according to an article in the Port Townsend *Leader*, say that increasing temperatures on the Olympic Peninsula and less rainfall makes the risk of fires caused by fireworks more likely. The ordinance would give local fire districts the ability to declare a fire hazard, which would lead to a ban on manufacture, sale, transportation, discharge, storage and use of fireworks.

Public displays would still be permitted with proper permits. The regulations being considered would include misdemeanor charges and fines up to \$1000; and for civil infractions to include fines of \$1000 or more. Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Philip Hunsucker told commissioners it's important for the public to understand the legal risks if they use fireworks and a fire should result. East Jefferson Fire Rescue Chief Bret Black said he appreciates the collaboration of local fire and county officials, particularly Prosecutor Hunsucker and Interim County Administrator Mark McCauley. "The enforcement part was the biggest sticking point." Black said, and also mentioned that firefighters can't be the only ones who respond to fireworks complaints, acknowledging that around the fourth of July, police and firefighters are stretched thin responding to calls. Black said, "Whatever we decide to implement, we know it won't be perfect." If you'd like to share your opinion with the County Commissioners, or just listen in, the proposed hearing will be held virtually at 11:45am Monday, February 28. Written comments are also welcome. Go to <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=876> for more information.

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. This is Jim Burke. Thank you for listening.