

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for March 8, 2022.

Public Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry, and Department of Emergency Management Director Willie Bence both spoke with the Board of County Commissioners yesterday, and answered questions. In Jefferson County, the current two week case rate is 385 per hundred thousand. Still falling. Total case count: 3,103 since the pandemic began. There are 39 cases currently in isolation, 3 are hospitalized. There have been 28 deaths due to COVID-19 in Jefferson County since the pandemic began.

In Clallam County, the current case rate is 230 per hundred thousand. Total number of cases: 10,833. 5 people are currently hospitalized, and there have been 104 deaths in Clallam County since the pandemic began.

Dr. Berry said the two most recent were a patient in their 80s and unvaccinated, and a patient over 80 years old who was vaccinated, but not boosted, and had underlying health conditions. She also mentioned that people might say, we are going to a level that is like a "...bad flu year..." She said we are still losing 1500 Americans every day to COVID-19." She went on to say that, "In a bad flu year, we lose 80 to 100 Americans every day to flu. We've never had a flu that took out 1500 people every day." Dr. Berry said Jefferson County's COVID-19 case numbers continue to drop. "This week, we are transitioning from the pandemic phase of our response to the endemic." She said, "There is a tendency for some folks to think 'endemic' means 'mild or not dangerous.' It does not. 'Endemic' means 'something that is with us.'" Some examples she mentioned of endemic diseases are the herpes virus and things like malaria. Dr. Berry said. "In the endemic phase, we are transitioning to a period where we don't think COVID-19 is going to overwhelm critical parts of our infrastructure." She said our society will be able to function with this level of disease right now.

She noted Jefferson is moving toward "not mandating" masks in indoor spaces, but rather "recommending them." The reason: our case rates are still relatively high. "So right now, in Jefferson County, if you walk into a room with 25 people and you're all unmasked, there is a 17% probability that one of those people has COVID-19," she explained. "And so that's why we still recommend you wear a mask because that's a pretty high probability that someone has COVID-19. When we see those case rates continue to go down, when they get to less than 100 cases per 100,000, that probability goes down to 5%. And so that's why we think it's reasonable to start unmasking when we get to that rate." So, pay attention.

(One thing that was mentioned: Rather than politicizing or polarizing judgments about mask wearing, we might want to adopt a compassionate approach. For example , if you are unmasked, and someone in a store or anywhere is speaking to you wearing a mask, that person might have a health issue or is simply trying to protect someone close to them and not bring the disease home with them. You could simply put on your mask while speaking with them to help protect them and their loved ones and to show some compassion.)

Dr. Berry went on to say that throughout the pandemic and even now, we can assume that all cases of COVID-19 are underreported. The PCR tests at hospitals, clinics and local health departments are the only tests that are reported by the State and Federal Governments. The home tests – or rapid tests, antigen tests – are very much underreported: not at all on the State and National level and underrepresented in the local, county numbers. That is why Dr. Berry says "documented cases." She says that throughout the pandemic, individuals might not recognize their symptoms as COVID-19 and might not test. Hundreds of millions of rapid home tests have gone out across the country, and part of the decline in Covid numbers officially, especially lately, could be due to underreporting of positive results.

The CDC is rating counties across the country with LOW, MEDIUM, OR HIGH case rates. Clallam and Jefferson Counties are now in the MEDIUM case rate category, according to the CDC website. CDC recommends that if you are at high risk for severe illness then talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions, stay up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine and boosters, and get tested if you have symptoms. Neighboring Kitsap County has fallen to the LOW case rate category. CDC recommends that if your community is in the low category that you should stay up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine and boosters, and get tested if you have symptoms (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>).

Jefferson Healthcare announced yesterday that registration for its Rhody Run Redux 2022 is now open. The revamped race, which will be taking place on May 22, will start and finish at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. Participants can choose from the 5K walk/run or the 10k walk/run. Registration is at <http://rhodyrun.com/>.

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.