

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for March 22, 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. Dr. Berry said that overall things are getting better, yet we are still losing 1100 Americans every day to COVID-19. In Jefferson County, "We are at the LOW risk threshold wherein most people can unmask in indoor spaces." The current two week case rate is 71 per hundred thousand. Total case count: 3,145 since the pandemic began. She said the County will be updating those numbers twice weekly, as has been requested by many members of our community. We have 2 hospitalized for a total of 115 hospitalizations since the pandemic began. There have been 28 deaths due to COVID-19 in Jefferson County since the pandemic began. "We've had no new deaths since the last time we spoke." she said.

In Clallam County, the current case rate is 132 per hundred thousand. Total number of cases: 10,913. 80 cases per hundred thousand. Two people are currently hospitalized, and there have been 108 deaths in Clallam County since the pandemic began.

We are now in the LOW risk category, in both Clallam and Jefferson Counties, "...so if you are at low risk for severe disease, it is now safe to unmask in indoor spaces." Dr. Berry said, "We do recommend that if you are at higher risk for severe disease, which is a decent proportion of our community, continue to mask until we reach that 50 cases per hundred thousand threshold, but right now we are on track to do that by this Friday." "In the U.K. cases are up 79%, and hospitalizations are up 40%." She said. When there is a rise in cases in The U.K., it usually predates a rise in the US by about a month. "Don't throw that mask away," Dr. Berry said, as we will probably see a rise in cases again in the next month or two. You can listen to Dr. Berry's and Willie Bence's full remarks and answers to questions on our website KPTZ.ORG.

A Port Townsend man was airlifted to Harborview yesterday after he was hurt in a collision with a minivan on State Route 19 / Airport Cutoff Road. According to a Washington State Patrol Incident Report, the 74-year-old man was riding his electric bicycle near the drive-in on the shoulder of the highway heading southbound, and when he attempted a left turn onto Parkridge Road he struck the passenger side of the minivan. There were no injuries to the occupant or driver of the minivan, who was not at fault. There were no drugs or alcohol involved. The cyclist who was airlifted to Harborview is now listed in satisfactory condition, according to an article in the *Peninsula Daily News* today.

There is still time to participate in the "streeteries survey" that Simon Jaynes mentioned last week, so you can share your views about restaurants using sidewalks or parking spaces to serve food and beverages outdoors. The PT City Council hopes to get public input this month, formulate new rules about the street cafes and create a permanent rule by the beginning of May. To sign up for the PT mainstreet newsletter go to <https://ptmainstreet.org/> and scroll to bottom.

Fire broke out again at the Port Townsend Paper Corp. on the morning of March 12. This was the mill's second blaze in recent months, but it was not as severe as the January 22 fire. The more recent fire started in a second-floor conveyor belt. The information in this report was gleaned from an article in the *Peninsula Daily News*.

The mill foreman said the crew was “unable to extinguish it due to its location and the inability to stretch their hose lines to it,” East Jefferson Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Justin Fletcher wrote in the incident report. EJFR Lt. Rick Martin said, “We located active fire on the conveyor belt, approximately four-by-four-foot pile of sawdust and rubber belting and grease from the roller bearings, with various small spot fires of the same material located up and down the conveyor belt.” EJFR extinguished the fire and cleared its last response unit in less than 90 minutes.

Last Friday, East Jefferson Fire Chief Bret Black said the cause was undetermined and added that “there was a hot motor in the area along with the wood chips.” Mill Manager Nick Nachbar, when asked by the *Peninsula Daily News*, whether anything had been learned – in terms of fire prevention and response – from the two fires, gave a response similar to the one he sent after the January blaze. “Port Townsend Paper Corporation employees and East Jefferson Fire and Rescue first responders did a commendable job in quickly minimizing the fire that occurred on March 12,” Nachbar wrote. “It started in an unused portion of the old wood mill area and was unrelated to any prior event; most importantly no personnel were injured. Operations were not impacted and the cause of the fire is under investigation.”

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.