

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for May 17, 2022.

I'll start right off with this commentary. Last Wednesday I was part of a small gathering in a small indoor setting: a celebration. There were about 16 people from the area – some masked, some not, all vaccinated. Out of the 16 people who attended this event, SEVEN have tested positive for COVID-19. As of today, I am fortunate not to be one of them. We know that the BA-2 omicron variant is more contagious than the previous strain. Of the seven people who have tested positive, all are reporting different degrees of illness. Some have few or no symptoms, but some have fever, splitting headaches, body aches, and coughs. So far, none of my friends from this event have been hospitalized.

It only takes one person, one who may or may not be symptomatic, who may or may not be vaccinated, to infect half the people in the room you are in. This is something public health officer Dr. Berry has mentioned before about this variant. Masking, ventilation, distance and being vaccinated and boosted are the best ways to stop the contagion.

In yesterday's briefing, Dr. Berry mentioned that Jefferson County residents by and large have been really good about doing all we can to keep our friends and neighbors safe. But “pandemic fatigue” is real. Many of us feel it and many wonder that if we're all going to get COVID-19 anyway, why bother? Give up! Enough already! I can't answer these questions for you. But for me, I had a sad, grim weekend hearing about people I care about getting sick from a disease that we know is preventable. They might be in for an uncomfortable 10 days; some might develop long COVID, a constellation of symptoms that affects some COVID-19 patients months and even years later. It is still unknown. What is known is how to stop spreading and contracting this disease. We have the tools, the know-how, and in the report that follows I'll remind you, our dear listeners, of some of the resources we have available.

Dr. Allison Berry and Willie Bence spoke to the Board of County Commissioners yesterday for their weekly public health briefing. COVID-19 case rates in Jefferson and Clallam Counties are EXTREMELY HIGH.

The two-week case rate in Jefferson County as of Friday was 646 per hundred thousand. Over the weekend, 66 cases were added, so there are now 171 people in isolation (an increase of 70 since last week) for a total of 3,770 cases since the pandemic began. No one is currently hospitalized. There have been 29 deaths since the pandemic began; one more since we last reported. The Jefferson County resident who died in another state of COVID-related pneumonia recently was over 70 years old, and was not vaccinated here. It is unknown if the deceased was vaccinated out of state.

In Clallam County, the current two-week case rate is 670 per hundred thousand. Total cases so far are 12,119, and as of last Friday, two people were hospitalized with COVID-19. One of those hospitalized is a child under 5 years old, but neither patient is in intensive care. There have been 112 deaths in Clallam County since the pandemic began. In both Clallam and Jefferson Counties, the case rate is steeply climbing. Dr. Berry says that because of home testing not all cases are being reported, so the numbers are actually way higher.

Dr. Berry said we are also starting to see clusters of cases in schools, which is not surprising with these case rates and with unmasked children in elementary school classrooms, side-by-side, and students moving through halls between classes in junior and senior high schools. She said, “There is a really high risk of being exposed to COVID-19 in schools at this point, just due to the un-masking there...Because of those clusters, we have mandated masks in certain affected classrooms, and most recently in a couple of schools as a whole, because we

were seeing such significant levels of transmission.” She continued, “We are likely to see additional need for masking requirements in schools in the coming weeks, just due to the amount of transmission. The primary goal there is we want to see our schools open, and our kids able to attend school, and if we get too much transmission in school, and if too many teachers get infected in particular, we lose our ability to keep kids in in-person school.” She added, “We don’t make these decisions lightly, but we have moved forward with masking in schools that are particularly affected by COVID-19.” She also said, “We are well beyond the case rate where we recommend masking for indoor settings... We are starting to see clusters of COVID -19 cases in workplaces again.”

You can look at the latest numbers, mask recommendations, and links to report positive COVID test results at the county’ websites (<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1429/COVID-19>) and <https://www.clallam.net/coronavirus/>).

Other helpful links:

- Order more home tests (<https://sayyescovidhometest.org/>)
- Testing and quarantine flowchart
<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/DocumentCenter/View/12518/Testing-Flowchart>)
- Nurse Consult Hotline: 360 344-3094

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five 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, and have a good Tuesday.