

This is Casey Dolan with your local news for Wednesday, December 14, 2022 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

The Washington State Department of Health held a medical briefing online yesterday to inform the public of the current status of respiratory illnesses in the state of Washington. All speakers confirmed the current viral trifecta of COVID-19, influenza, and Respiratory syncytial virus (or RSV), affecting the state of Washington and that the hospitals were being overwhelmed at present.

Umair A. Shah, the Secretary of Health, addressed general concerns of prevention and safety. He said, “A little prevention goes a long way. Do your part and stay updated on your vaccines.”

Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett, the Chief Science Officer talked about a sharp increase in hospitalizations for flu, but noted that RSV infections are declining significantly. He said, “However, we’re not out of the woods yet by any means. We encourage everybody to do their part to relieve the strain on our healthcare system. Treat symptoms at home if possible.”

Michele Roberts, the Assistant Secretary for Prevention & Community Health, spoke about vaccines and that the new booster shot is now available to children as young as six months old, but she expressed a concern about the slow uptake rates among children under 12, despite Washington being one of the most vaccinated states in the country. She said, “It is especially concerning given the concurrent presence of COVID, RSV, and flu in our communities. We are really concerned about the lagging COVID-19 booster rates. It leaves people at risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19.”

Questions from local journalists followed the initial talks, including whether new mask requirements would be put into effect. Both Shah and Lacy M. Fehrenbach, the Chief of Prevention, Safety, and Health, answered that no mask requirements are in place beyond recommending that the public wear masks in crowded public settings because that is where the greatest likelihood of transmission occurs. For the full briefing, see <https://tvw.org/video/washington-state-department-of-health-media-briefing-20221203/?eventID=2022121203>.

As reported in the *PT Leader* yesterday, a fire broke out in the Port Townsend Paper Mill provoking an evacuation of employees. Both East Jefferson Fire Rescue and Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue responded to the mill, with the first-arriving firefighters observing light smoke coming from the sixth floor. One firefighter was injured and taken to Jefferson Healthcare for exhaustion-related symptoms. Other responders are being checked for any health impacts from fighting the fire. East Jefferson Fire Rescue Chief Bret Black told the *Leader*, “We have formal rehab set up with medical monitoring for our people.”

Volunteers from Station 13 helped staff the rehab unit for the incident, and numerous off-duty personnel were called in to staff stations. Even so, more help was needed Tuesday, Black said. He explained, “We had other emergencies occurring during the mill fire, leaving the first alarm assignment suboptimal. Once again we found ourselves spread too thin. But, even if we had all on-duty personnel available, we still do not have enough firefighters.” The building’s sprinklers were not activated during the fire, according to East Jefferson Fire Rescue. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined because access was difficult. This is the third fire at the mill within a year.

As a step towards greater transparency in political advertising and to fight the spread of disinformation online manipulated by foreign actors, Washington Representative Derek Kilmer and Mike Gallagher from Wisconsin have reintroduced the Honest Ads Act. The bill would ensure online political advertisements are better monitored by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and would enable the FEC to enact rules for online advertisement like those in place for television, radio, and satellite ads, with the goal of making clear to the American public who is funding these online ads and to inhibit foreign actors from purchasing them.

The Fort Worden Public Development Authority (FWPDA) is moving towards decarbonizing the Authority's campus operations. Mukilteo-based UMC will work with the FWPDA to perform a campus-wide Investment Grade Geo-Thermal Energy Assessment Audit. This will be a thorough review of the campus buildings' HVAC equipment and whether that equipment needs to be replaced. They will also determine the feasibility for a district-wide emergency system. The purpose is to bring operations and infrastructure more up to date, which includes the elimination of oil boilers, some of which are no longer serviceable. In a press release, Board President David King said, "This is a very exciting project... we will be taking basically the ninth inning of 19th century technology and bringing it up into the 21st century. So that would be a huge leap forward for us." It is expected the audit will take six months to complete, with initial work to begin this month.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Casey Dolan and I thank you for listening.