

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, January 17, 2023.

This morning, Dr. Allison Berry and Willie Bence submitted a Public Health report to the Jefferson Board of County Commissioners and answered questions. Dr. Berry said that the BB 1.1 variant, which is causing a surge in the US on the east coast, is far less prevalent here, and that the high uptake of the bi-valent booster here in Jefferson County is helping to keep those numbers down. In Jefferson County, the two-week case rate is 246 cases per 100,000 people. 1 person is currently hospitalized, and 43 new cases were added this week for a total of 6,723 cases since the pandemic began. The total number of people lost in Jefferson County to COVID-19 holds steady at 34. Jefferson County Public Health staff estimate that 1 in 10 COVID-19 cases in the county were reported to public health last week. Dr. Berry says that the case ascertainment rate indicates there's an estimated 430 cases here in Jefferson County currently, and the case rate could be over 2000 per hundred thousand.

Sustained decreases in RSV and Influenza are happening right now. One man in his 70s was lost due to influenza this past week. He had underlying health conditions and was not vaccinated against the flu. Dr. Berry continues to stress that we should all continue with masking, keeping up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine and boosters. The risk of COVID-19 transmission in public, indoor places is still HIGH. At this level, it's strongly recommended everyone wear a well-fitting, high-quality mask in public, indoor settings. <https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1466/Case-Information> has all the numbers.

There will be two Health Reports in February so, the first Monday, February 6 and the third Monday is Presidents Day, so Tuesday February 21 for that second February report. Submit your Public Health questions to Dr. Allison Berry and Willie Bence by emailing contactus@kptz.org by Friday February 3 at noon, to be answered the following Monday February 6, at 9:45am on KPTZ during the Jim B. Show hosted by yours truly!

This story is from Alexandria Osborne of the *Washington State Journal* and was on the PT *Leader* website. In Olympia, four dogs sat in a House hearing room and two more watched the room over Zoom as a legislative committee discussed rules dog handlers must follow in courthouses for dogs to assist people who are providing testimony, including youth with disabilities. Ellen O'Neill-Stephens, founder of the Courthouse Dogs Foundation said, "I can't say how amazing these dogs are when something bad has happened to your kids, my kids. Really, they're our kids. All these kids belong to us. To be able to provide this link from the dog to the child when the child is in stress makes all the difference in the world."

Currently, the state of Washington allows courthouse dogs in judicial proceedings, said Committee Counsel John Burzynski, but bill advocates say more specific authorities and clarifications are needed. For example, if a witness is under the age of 18 or has a developmental disability, the bill outlines how courts may allow a dog during testimony, Burzynski said. Sue Bucy, executive director for the Center for Healthy Families, brought her courthouse dog, Louis, to the hearing. Louis sits with children when discussing physical and sexual abuse, and goes to therapy with children as well, Bucy said. Recently, a young girl was ready to go to court, but told her therapist she would go only if Louis went with her. O'Neill-Stephens said courthouse dogs can help with investigations and the prosecution of crimes. She has testified in favor of changes to current law in two previous legislative sessions, and said she hopes the modifications will pass this year, she said. The second time the bill was presented, it went through the Senate and was passed quickly before being sent to the House, she said, but it was never approved by the House. The bill, HB 1077, was presented by Rep. My-Linh Thai, D-Bellevue. The committee voted unanimously to move the bill forward.

[Alexandria Osborne is a reporter with the *Washington State Journal*. The *Washington State Journal* is a nonprofit news website operated by the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation. Learn more at <https://www.wastatejournal.org/>.]

On the Washington State Ferries website, there is a long list of tidal cancellations for the Port Townsend - Coupeville ferry route (<https://wsdot.com/ferries/schedule/addcancelbysimpleroute.aspx?routeid=8>). There were two – one in each direction – Monday evening. In addition, there will be cancellations every evening between this Wednesday, January 18 and next Monday January 23.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening!