

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, April 18, 2023.

As of April 11, the Washington State Department of Health website reports the two-week case rate in Jefferson County is approximately 115 cases per 100,000 people, keeping Jefferson County in the moderate category of transmission. No one is currently hospitalized. There have been a total of 5,019 reported cases in Jefferson County since the pandemic began. There were no new deaths as of April 11, so the total number of those who have died due to COVID-19 is 36 in Jefferson County.

In neighboring Clallam County the two-week COVID-19 case rate is approximately 77 cases per 100,000 people, keeping Clallam County in the low category of transmission. There have been a total of 15,991 reported cases in Clallam County since the pandemic began. The total number of those who have died due to COVID-19 is 217 in Clallam County.

As reported this morning by NBC News, the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday authorized a second dose of the updated COVID-19 booster for older adults and people with weakened immune systems. Those 65 and older can get a second dose of the updated versions of Pfizer-BioNTech's and Moderna's Covid booster at least four months after their last dose, the FDA said in a statement. Most people who are immunocompromised can get an additional dose at least two months after their last dose, according to the agency.

The FDA also authorized using the bivalent formula in all COVID-19 vaccines moving forward and is doing away with the multi-dose primary series for people who have not yet been vaccinated. That means people who haven't been vaccinated yet would get a single dose of the updated vaccine.

The FDA's decision will now be handed off to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has scheduled a meeting with its panel of outside advisers for tomorrow, Wednesday, April 19. If the panel votes in favor of the additional boosters and Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, signs off, immunizations could begin immediately.

The booster shots were reformulated last August to target the BA.4 and BA.5 omicron subvariants, in addition to the original strain of the virus. As of Saturday, roughly 78% of new U.S. COVID-19 cases are caused by the omicron subvariant XBB.1.5, according to the CDC. Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Toronto, said that while the boosters don't match the currently circulating strain, they should still provide people with some protection. A CDC report published in January found that the updated COVID-19 boosters reduced the risk of COVID-19 infection from the XBB.1.5 subvariant by nearly half. Another study, published by Israeli researchers in the *Lancet* this month, found that COVID-19 boosters reduced the risk of hospitalization in people 65 and older by 72%.

Bogoch said, "To date, regardless of the circulating variant, the vaccines continue to provide meaningful protection against severe manifestations of the virus, such as hospitalizations and death." Tuesday's move comes several months after an advisory committee to the FDA raised doubts about moving to yearly COVID-19 boosters for most adults and children, but appeared to be supportive of multiple doses for the most at-risk Americans, like older people or people with weakened immune systems. BA.4 and BA.5 are no longer in circulation in the U.S.

Back in 2008, Jefferson County residents took a gamble by voting to give the Jefferson County Public Utility District the opportunity to acquire utility giant Puget Sound Energy's holdings in the surrounding area. Since finalizing the power purchase for \$103 million in 2013, the move marked the first private-to-public transfer of utility services for more than half a century in Washington state. Celebrating that achievement and a decade of serving the community, the local utility district held a luncheon last Tuesday, April 11 to commemorate 10 years of hard work keeping the lights on. The event was catered by Mo Chili Barbecue, with a pulled pork sandwich, mac and cheese, cole slaw and even a breadfruit alternative to the pulled pork sandwich. In a phone interview with the *PT Leader*, General Manager Kevin Streett said, "The PUD is to the point now where we can look forward to the future, to become more resilient and support the community. We would like to thank the community for their support."

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