

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, February 2, 2021.

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Jefferson County reported four new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, bringing the total to 307. At present, 23 people are awaiting test results.

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In his weekly briefing to county commissioners on Monday Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke reported that Jefferson has seen a tripling in the trend of positive cases. Two weeks ago we had 8 new cases; last week there were 26 reported.

Locke said that of 5,019 doses of the Pfizer vaccine administered so far, 90% originated from Jefferson Healthcare and the remainder from local pharmacies. More first doses are expected this week. Priority is given to those with cancer or who are undergoing chemotherapy, and those over 75 with major risk factors. Locke said he expects that Jefferson's vaccine supply should stabilize in a couple weeks and we will be able to predict how long it will take to get through the age tiers. Once we have a supply, there will be a move to hold mass vaccinations at a site like a school gym. He said 80% of Jefferson County residents want to be vaccinated and currently 26,000 are eligible in the current 65-plus tier.

All vaccines have to be administered within 7 days of receipt and state-wide, and 62% of the available vaccine has been administered. Jefferson continues to be one of the lowest risk counties with the metrics needed to move forward to Phase 2. However, we are connected to Clallam, Kitsap and Mason counties. Mason has high transmission rates bolstered by the population at the Shelton Correction Facility where all inmate COVID -19 cases are sent.

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On February 15, the state will announce recalculations and the potential for areas to move forward or backward. Last week Governor Jay Inslee said that King County was among those that could move to phase two of the recovery plan while the region containing Jefferson, Clallam, Kitsap and Mason Counties remain in phase one.

In a Facebook post District 1 County Commissioner Kate Dean characterized the process as "bizarre" – how several counties with more cases than Jefferson will be allowed to move to phase two. She said that one of the metrics behind the decision was a drop in cases in those counties, but since Jefferson didn't have that many cases to begin with it's hard to demonstrate a drop. Dean said that penalizing good behaviour is poor policy-making, criticising our grouping with higher COVID-19 areas like Kitsap and Mason counties. As a result, she said, we are being held back by factors we have nothing to do with.

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The joint superintendent search continues, as candidates to lead the district appear in a series of virtual community meetings. The 30-minute meetings take place every day at 3pm, with the link available on both district websites.

Three of the four candidates are up for both positions. Edmonds High School Principal Dr. Scott Mauk appeared on Monday. Portland Public Schools supervisor Katie Lindholm, who is a finalist in Port Townsend

only, appears today, Tuesday. On Wednesday Highline Public Schools employee Linda Rosenbury will appear. The fourth candidate, on for Thursday, is as yet unannounced.

After the community meetings, both school boards will continue to check references until making final offers to the candidates. There is no set schedule for the final announcement, but both superintendents are expected to be in place for the next school year.

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President Joe Biden has implemented a policy requiring masks on Federal property, airports and public transit, stating that if people comply, COVID-19 will be more under control. This doesn't really affect us here in Jefferson County, as public entities are already enforcing the mask requirement. We still need to pay attention, and those who have received the vaccine are required to mask and social distance for the foreseeable future. Locke is an advocate of wearing two masks: an inner surgical type with a cloth mask on the outside to improve the fit of the surgical one.

We may live in a relatively safe bubble here, but many parts of the country are decidedly not on board. Locke said 13 states have no masking requirements and within those states, there is severe spread. He said that anyone on the fence about masking is jeopardizing public health and promoting the spread of the variants.

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through [news@kptz.org](mailto:news@kptz.org).

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.