

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with a special COVID 19 report for Saturday, March 14, 2020.

On Friday, the Jefferson County Department of Public Health reported a second confirmed case of the virus for a Jefferson County resident, although that person did not contract the disease in the county. He is now under treatment at the VA hospital in Seattle.

According to a statement on the department's web site the patient is a man in his seventies who has been residing in a King County long term care facility since early February. The patient is designated as a Jefferson County case as it is his legal residence, but he has not been in the county since his exposure, and had no contact with any county resident since that time.

The first locally exposed patient, a man in his sixties, was similarly exposed in King County. He is now in isolation in his home. So even as our reported cases increase two fold, there is still no evidence of community based transmission in Jefferson County.

County Health officer Doctor Thomas Locke told KPTZ that he expects this to change, and that the virus will go on for months and months. To accommodate this, his department will ramp up its emergency communications procedures and begin to provide detailed daily updates. This information will be posted on the department's website, and will be reported as it happens here on KPTZ.

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Locke said escalating action will occur once there is a confirmation of community based transmission of the virus in Jefferson County. Until then, people are taking a number of measures to decrease the virus' impact or, as it is now commonly known, to flatten the curve.

Jefferson Healthcare has instituted a visitor restriction policy, encouraging people to postpone unnecessary visits to the hospital. Anyone with a respiratory illness, including a fever, sore throat or cold, needs to postpone any hospital visit until they feel better. Anyone with exposure to the virus needs to stay away from the hospital for fourteen days.

The main entrance to the hospital is closed. Anyone entering the hospital must pass through the Waterside doors or the ER/Express Clinic doors. There are exceptions for the family birth center and to visit other patients in crisis. For more information go to the hospital's web site.

The policy will remain in process until the virus is no longer a threat to patients, staff and community. Which, as Locke said, could take months.

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Like all the school districts in the state, yhe Port Townsend School District will close down beginning on Tuesday, March 17, through April 24. Since many students depend on a school lunch for meals the district has instituted a free meal program. Anyone under the age of eighteen can visit one of four locations – Salish Coast Elementary, Port Townsend High School, Jefferson County Airport, and the Cape George Fire Hall – to pick up a free lunch. The service is available from 9am to 11am on Weekdays.

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People are discouraged from visiting the Jefferson County Courthouse unless it's absolutely necessary, which is pretty much restricted to court actions. County departments like the auditor, treasurer, and clerk all have the facility to serve the public through the internet, email, telephone or good old fashioned regular postal mail.

The Board of Commissioners will hold its regular Monday meeting, which will include a briefing by Dr. Locke at 9:40am.

The virus emergency does not thwart our ability to submit public comments to the board. They can be submitted from home through a dedicated email address, [publiccomments@co.jefferson.wa.us](mailto:publiccomments@co.jefferson.wa.us). They can be no longer than three minutes each, so you'll need to read them to yourself to make sure they're under the limit. Any comment received by 9am on Monday will be read aloud at the meeting.

The Port Townsend City Council has a similar comment policy. Any comments sent to [publiccomment@cityofpt.us](mailto:publiccomment@cityofpt.us) by 6:30pm on Monday will be read aloud. While the county and city comment addresses are similar, note that the county address is plural, public comments, while the city is singular.

Both County Commissioner and City Council meetings are still open to the public, so the virus has not threatened our democracy. So far.

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The Port Townsend Pool at the Mountain View Community Center is closed immediately and will open on April 24 at the earliest. The Port Townsend Library is also closed for the same period. All library due dates will be extended, but the remaining community read events will be rescheduled for the Fall. Hold services are not available. Also cancelled, the Friends of the Library book sale scheduled for March twenty first.

You can still check out digital books and streamed movies through the library's website, <https://ptpubliclibrary.org/library>. The Jefferson County Library (<https://jclibrary.info/>) is also closed.

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This is, as Doctor Locke said, just the beginning. We can expect more closures and inconveniences as the emergency unfolds. If you want to go anywhere or attend an event, call first to see if it's still happening. In the meantime there are the standard cautions, which can't be repeated enough: Wash hands, cover mouths, stay home when sick, clean surfaces, and stay informed. The county and state health departments have active web sites, and <https://kptz.org/> is updated regularly.

For more information about COVID 19 and to hear an in depth conversation with Jefferson County Health officer doctor Thomas Locke, listen to this week's Compass at Noon today with a repeat at the same time on Monday.

This is Charlie Bermant for KPTZ news. Thank you for listening, and stay healthy.