

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Charlie Bermant, reporting from homewith news and commentary for Thursday, March 26, 2020.

The latest COVID 19 exposure count in Jefferson County is ten, as of Wednesday afternoon. Three of these are presumed as in-county exposures, while seven were contracted outside the county. Jefferson County Health Officer Tom Locke said yesterday that some of these could have originated overseas. Of the 436 patients tested, 235 are negative, while 191 are awaiting results.

As for local testing, some results are taking up to a week, which is far below the preferred expectation of 24 to 72 hours. This could change in early April, when testing could take place in Jefferson County's own lab. According to information presented at a Jefferson Healthcare Webinar yesterday, the hospital has the equipment and staff to do so, but some tests are necessary in order to get the lab running. When this is up and running, this could not only decrease the testing time but increase the number of available tests. But, as with anything else during this emergency, success depends on a series of interconnecting factors.

In response to a highly publicized shortage, we see people driving cars and going to supermarkets wearing facemasks. While this can give people a sense of security, such behavior doesn't correspond to the intention of facemasks, which are primarily meant to prevent an infected person from transmitting sneeze and cough residue to those who are not infected.

Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Thomas Locke said that people who need to use the masks because they may be infected should not be in any supermarket or public setting. Gloves are similarly misunderstood, as they retain more germs than skin. The best process, Locke said, is to skip the gloves and continue vigorous hand washing.

Making masks at home could be an effective way to help stop the spread of the virus. Homemade masks, however, are intended for community members and will not be used in medical offices unless the shortage becomes more drastic and community members are given the tools to make medically specific masks.

Local mask-making efforts are not coordinated, but that could change. According to Emergency Operations Center spokesperson Keppie Keplinger, details to establish mask-making protocols are still pending and will soon be posted on the EOC website. People are requested to not contact Jefferson Healthcare with questions or deliver homemade masks to the hospital.

The COVID-19 emergency has extended several government deadlines. Taxes are now due in July, rather than April, and the Census has pushed back its deadline. As for property taxes, the first half is still due on April 30 and the second in October, but Jefferson County treasurer Stacie Prada is requesting property owners who can afford to pay the whole amount now should do so, as the increased

cash will support essential services, most critically health and hospital districts. In a press release, Prada said that local governments will be hard-pressed to provide services through the end of this pandemic and the end of this year. Paying your full year's taxes in the first half will help bridge the gap before any state or federal assistance may arrive.

Early payers will benefit from a reduced service fee for eCheck users, and Prada is implementing a program to forgive penalties and interest for those property owners who experience financial hardship.

As for the census, by now each of us presumably has received instructions in the mail. April 1 is the census day, and we need to indicate our normal place of residence on that date. So if a college student is home due to the COVID 19 shutdown, they should fill out their forms as if they still live on campus.

The previous requirement was to respond by the end of April, but that's been pushed back to August. This seems unnecessary, as it's not that difficult or time-consuming to just get it over with. And as Jefferson County Census coordinator Jeannie McMacken points out, most people are out of work now and have a lot of time on their hands.

You don't have to wait until April 1 to fill out the form. It turns out that a census tract in Uptown Port Townsend has already drawn a response of nearly 40 percent.

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This is Charlie Bermant with today's news, reminding you that everything could change tomorrow.