

You're listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. This is Lily Haight telling you about what's new in this week's Port Townsend Leader.

As of March 24th, there were 2,221 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Washington, with a total of 110 deaths in the state.

Governor Jay Inslee's "Stay-at-Home" order goes into effect for non-essential businesses today, requiring all Washingtonians to stay home for a minimum of two weeks, only leaving the house to go to the grocery store, the pharmacy or to the doctor. Essential services will still operate. A list of all essential services can be found on the governor's website.

Willful violation of this order is illegal and will be enforced according to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, but deputies will not be conducting random compliance checks.

The trajectory of the coronavirus epidemic lies in the hands of the community, said Public Health Officer Tom Locke.

Now that county officials have determined there is community-spread of coronavirus in Jefferson County, it is imperative that citizens stay home

Jefferson County Public Health and Jefferson Healthcare are doing everything they can to test patients and notify those who have been in contact with the coronavirus as soon as possible. But the limited number of testing supplies makes it impossible to test as many people as necessary.

The hospital must follow state criteria and only test those who have COVID-19 symptoms.

According to Amy Yaley, supplies are in a critical state.

Right now, the hospital has adequate supplies, Yaley said. But if the number of patients increases, the supplies they have will not be enough.

The hospital has averaged 42 tests over the last three days.

Due to the limits on testing, there are likely many more cases than actually confirmed, Locke said.

"Some people are using the model that states there are at least 10 times as many as you test for," he said.

"The truth is, we simply don't know."

Nearly two years after a herring-spawning event whitened the waters of Discovery Bay, history is repeating itself with what the Coastal Watershed Institute in Port Angeles described as "record levels" of herring spawning in the Salish Sea, over a period of at least two weeks as of March 18.

While the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recorded "very light" levels of herring spawn in Quilcene Bay as of March 17, that same survey showed "medium-heavy," "heavy" and "very heavy" levels of herring spawn in Dabob Bay, just off Brinnon.

The CWI's Anne Shaffer explained that "white water" is the colloquial term for the milt sprayed by males to fertilize the newly laid eggs.

"Scores of marine mammals and thousands of birds congregate to feed on the thick carpets of eggs laid on eelgrass and Sargassum seaweed along the shore," Shaffer said. "The eggs are still developing but will soon hatch, marking the beginning the 2020 spring plankton season that, in turn, supports the rest of our Salish Sea food chain."

The herring eggs, and those feeding on them, can be seen at low tide at nearshore, "an uplifting time and place that brings everything together again."

As thousands more workers across the state face layoffs and are forced to stay at home, one thing is weighing heavy on some people's minds; "How am I going to pay rent on April 1?"

Some Jefferson County landlords are cutting the cost of rents to support their tenants during this time.

Deputy Mayor David Faber called on landlords at the March 16 Port Townsend City Council meeting to consider suspending rent for April or at the very least lowering it to cover costs so that the burden is shared. Dave Garrett who owns the Salmon Business Park in Port Hadlock said before the governor ordered a complete shutdown of all non-essential businesses, 30% of his tenants had to shut their doors. He is going to suspend rent payments for the month of April. He said he's lucky that he owns his property outright and doesn't have to make mortgage payments like some others.

Kris Nelson, who owns several Port Townsend restaurants and commercial properties including the Bartlett Building and the building that houses the Fountain Cafe, said that for her reducing rent to half-price for her tenants was a no-brainer and she hopes to see more landlords following suit.

"I have a responsibility to my tenants and if I could give them free rent altogether I would," Nelson said.

For these stories and more, check out this week's edition of the Leader on newsstands now. This is Lily Haight, Leader news reporter, on KPTZ 91.9 FM.