

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday, June 2, 2020.

Jefferson County reported another case of COVID-19, bringing the in-county total to 31 cases. The newest case was an asymptomatic child under ten, who was tested as part of pre-surgery screening, a process that is now required for anyone receiving a procedure at Jefferson Healthcare.

The test was administered on Sunday and reported on Monday, underscoring how local testing can now provide fast results.

As of Monday afternoon, 1,835 local residents have been tested with 1,784 testing negative. Twenty people are awaiting results. As Jefferson Healthcare continues to test amid no new cases, the number of positives is now just 1.7% of those tested.

At his weekly briefing to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, Health Officer Dr. Thomas Locke said that the public needs to stay vigilant, estimating that the county could have as many as ten times more cases than those reported.

Locke said he does not advocate mass testing, as doing so in Jefferson County would cost millions of dollars and only flag a handful of cases. Instead, he encourages anyone who believes they have been exposed to come forward and be tested, as the tests are now available to anyone who needs them.

If you feel the need to be tested, call 360-344-3094 for an appointment. If you missed the number it is published on the Jefferson Healthcare web page.

As Jefferson County begins its Phase 2 reopening, Locke stresses the continued need for wearing masks and social distancing. There is some resistance to these ideas. Some people have turned the mask mandate into an argument about personal liberty, saying that a person has the right to not wear a mask. Locke disagrees, saying that COVID 19 is a dangerous disease, and the only right invoked by someone who is not wearing a mask is the right to infect other people.

The two top law enforcement officials in Jefferson County addressed the county commissioners on Monday, expressing concern about the recent nationwide riots prompted by the brutal in-custody death of a Minneapolis man, while stating that there would be no such behavior from local police.

Jefferson County Sheriff Joe Nole and Interim Port Townsend Police Chief Troy Surber submitted statements to the board, pledging to maintain public trust by treating the citizenry with respect.

Surber said the police department will be doing everything in our power to make Port Townsend a community that welcomes diversity, protects the most vulnerable among us, where all are equal before the law.

In his statement, Nole said that every person deserves justice, promising to continue our work to improve policies, training, culture, and transparency. As a profession, we must always continue to improve in all things, he said. As protectors of the community we must hold ourselves to the highest standards.

Two recent demonstrations on opposite ends of the political spectrum have occurred in Port Townsend over the last few weeks, with no incidences of violence or vandalism. Nole said that people in Port Townsend are fortunate to live in a place that, so far, has escaped the destructive behavior occurring in other parts of the country.

The Jefferson County Fair is among events cancelled due to COVID-19, but the fairgrounds have been repurposed as an impromptu homeless shelter. According to information presented to the county commissioners from Director of Emergency Management Willie Bence, 29 homeless people are now housed inside a fairgrounds building with an additional 15 housed in tents.

Homeless sheltering was moved first from the American Legion, which could not guarantee effective social distancing, and then from a local hotel.

Olycap, which runs the shelter, has secured some rooms at local hotels if the need to isolate arises.

The decision about returning to the Legion or using the Fairgrounds as a more permanent option won't be made for a few months, Bence said.

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.

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today's news. Thank you for listening.