

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Carmen Jaramillo with local news for September 14, 2021.

Cases of COVID-19 in Jefferson County and across the state of Washington are leveling out this week, Dr. Allison Berry public health officer said Monday in her weekly report to the Board of County Commissioners. While case rates are beginning to slow down, we are not out of the woods yet she said although the health department is cautiously optimistic. Public health added 16 new cases yesterday bringing the total confirmed case count to 871. 80 cases are in active isolation and 88 people are awaiting test results.

Last week was the deadliest of the pandemic for Jefferson County with nine deaths reported since September 2. Of those nine deaths, at least seven occurred in elderly patients of local long term care facilities. Although many of these victims were vaccinated, they may not have been able to properly respond to their doses because of advanced age and weakened immune systems Berry said. Reported deaths often lag a few weeks behind increased case rates so we may expect to see more deaths locally. In the United States approximately 1,600 people are dying per day of COVID-19. Thirteen people have died of COVID-19 in Jefferson County since the start of the pandemic.

Those who are immunosuppressed are currently eligible for a third dose of the vaccine in Jefferson County. If these boosters will be made available to the public at large is unknown. Berry said current available evidence may suggest a third dose is unnecessary for most healthy people. Strain on hospitals and ICU capacity remains high statewide. Extra strain is being placed on hospitals in Eastern Washington as residents of neighboring Idaho are crossing the state-line to seek medical care. Elective surgeries at Jefferson Healthcare have been suspended in order to free up staffing for the ICU she said. The health department and the department of emergency management are looking to activate local medical volunteers to help in any way they can. The best way to reduce the strain on hospitals and to protect our communities is to get the vaccine, Berry said. Many young and healthy people may believe the vaccine is unnecessary for them since they have a low-risk of dying from the virus, but the delta variant does not discriminate, Berry said. More and more unvaccinated young people and children are falling ill daily. One strong piece of evidence for the efficacy of the vaccines Berry said is to contrast Jefferson and Clallam Counties case rates. Jefferson County has much higher rates of vaccination and much lower rates of infection than it's neighbor.

Jefferson County's vaccine requirement for indoor dining went into effect September 4. Berry said that from speaking to local businesses she has heard most customers are compliant with the order and not causing problems for restaurant workers. She said last week the department was giving restaurants a grace period to come into compliance but starting this week they will begin contacting businesses who are not enforcing the mandate and attempting to bring them into compliance. Businesses who do not comply with the mandate will have their permits with the health department suspended. Restaurants who really do not want to enforce the order still have options to transition to take-out or outdoor dining only, she said.

In non-pandemic related news, an Oak Harbor woman is seeking \$150,000 from the City of Port Townsend for injuries she sustained after partially falling through a manhole cover downtown in 2018. The 35 year old woman filed suit in May against the city to cover medical costs, lost wages and loss of enjoyment in life related to her injuries. Shenna Bomark was walking downtown with her family in June 2018 when a manhole cover near the intersection of Polk and Water street gave way beneath her, sending one leg through the hole and

hyperextending the other. Bomark landed on her tailbone and sustained scrapes and bruises to her legs and arms. After the incident, Bomark claims she was unable to work for several months due to her injuries and after the company she was working for went out of business she has been unable to find another job.

The cost breakdown of the suit includes approximately \$26,000 in medical bills, \$23,000 in lost earning capacity and \$100,000 for loss of enjoyment of life. Since the fall, Bomark claims she has been unable to sleep through the night, cannot perform long distance cardio, and suffers from constant stress and anxiety. Her injuries also require physical therapy to treat ongoing pain.

Bomark is also seeking damages from Interwest Construction, a contractor Bomark's lawyers allege left the manhole cover unsecured and unmarked causing the fall. Interwest denies responsibility for the incident saying they were not contracted for replacement or repair of any aspect of the manhole cover and were not aware of any danger it presented before the fall.

And that's it for today's local news. 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. I'm Carmen Jaramillo. Thanks for listening.