

HOT TOPIC #1: MARCH 15TH

TESTING AND RUMOR CONTROL

COVID-19 updates from San Juan County around subjects on the minds of islanders.

TESTING

A lot of people have questions about testing. We want to highlight a few key things:

- First off, if you're on Orcas or Lopez, [read this excellent article](#) from Anne Presson of the Lopez and Orcas Hospital Districts (and the County Response Team) with info specific to those islands. Similar general information will be summarized below with the whole County in mind.
- It's important to understand that not everyone who feels ill needs to be tested, particularly those with mild illness. A health care provider will determine if you should be tested, and it's likely their advice on managing your symptoms will be the same whether you test positive or negative. Tests are being given by healthcare providers in San Juan County, and islanders with significant symptoms are being tested.
- That's not to say that we wouldn't love to see the surge of testing availability that we keep hearing about at the national level, or that our response wouldn't benefit from wide availability of testing. The better our testing is the better our understanding. We're confident that testing availability will continue to improve, and we're as eager as anyone for that to happen. But it's important to know that islanders are being tested now, and have been for some time.
- According to the World Health Organization and many others, the vast majority of those who get COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms and feel better within a couple of weeks. Those with underlying health issues are at greater risk for more severe symptoms, and it's important that our medical providers have the time and resources to closely monitor those patients. If you experience symptoms of illness and you can manage your illness at home, please stay there and avoid contact with others.
- The idea of the "test kit" has been poorly explained in the media. Test kits are the supplies that individual large off-island laboratories use to test samples for COVID-19. The process for testing starts with nasal and/or throat sample taken by your health care provider. The healthcare provider sends the sample to one of the large laboratories for testing. It is likely that the laboratory is the same one that they use to provide other types of test results in normal times.
- We are hopeful that in the weeks to come, new technologies, approaches and delivery models for testing become available that will expand testing to a broader swath of the community. This will be a very good thing, and the San Juan County response team is making plans for when this might become available.
- At this time there are no positive test results in San Juan County. The Health Department recommends self-quarantine for patients with pending test results and their close household contacts while waiting for results. If a positive result is received, Public Health staff will trace wider contacts and provide guidance on limiting disease spread - including isolation and quarantine requirements.

RUMOR CONTROL

The County COVID-19 response team has received many questions about information being shared in the community regarding islanders who have symptoms that might be COVID-19, who were transported, or are friends or family members of someone who has been tested. A few key points about this type of speculation:

- A number of islanders have contacted their healthcare providers and been treated for COVID-19 like symptoms. Some of them have tested positive for other illnesses (influenza for example), some have tested negative for COVID-19, and some have been tested for COVID-19 and are still waiting on results. Just because someone has symptoms that could be COVID-19 does not mean they have it. At this time, San Juan County is not aware of any positive test results. Obviously that can (and likely will) change at any moment.
- The County will be updating the [case count page](#) daily. The community may have information that we don't because we're a small community and word travels fast. We'll keep the page updated daily, and know that as soon as there is a positive case, public health responders will be conducting rapid case tracking and communication with those impacted.
- We're a small community and everyone knows someone who is a healthcare provider or who is a school employee or who works in a medical office or is otherwise informed. Those people should be thoughtful about avoiding speculation and keeping confidential information to themselves, and we in the community should recognize the hard work they're doing and the stress they're likely under.
- And just some words about rumors in general: we're living in a time of unprecedented anxiety and high emotion. If ever there were a moment to breathe deep and think twice before sharing unverified information, this is it. We want to be smart, efficient, and coordinated in our response, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we need to jump every time we catch the slightest hint of trouble. Stay calm islanders, our spirit will see us through. Thanks to all.