

HOT TOPIC #23: May 21, 2020

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

The 2020 Memorial Day Weekend in the San Juan Islands

With roots dating back to the Civil War, Memorial Day is a time for our nation to remember and honor military personnel who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. In addition, Memorial Day weekend is the traditional kick-off to the summer vacation and tourist season, especially here in the San Juan Islands. Sadly, the 2020 Memorial Day weekend is looking nothing like previous years.

The islands have done an amazing job of staying focused on frequent hand washing, respecting social distancing guidelines, and embracing mask wearing as part of our daily rituals. Our commitment and care has helped the San Juan Islands avoid the severe impacts we have seen elsewhere. The islands' track record to date has been remarkable and we want to keep it that way.

While our islands slowly move through the stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we need to focus on keeping ourselves, our families, and our neighbors safe. This crisis is far from over, and the disease is still around us. The goal is to avoid any sort of local spread that threatens our ability to move forward.

We want you to find enjoyment this weekend but balance your activities with staying healthy.

As we go into this long weekend, please remember:

Are we now in Phase 2? NO. While there is a possibility that San Juan County may be there soon, we're still in Phase 1. That means nearly all of the restrictions we've been living with since March are still in place.

Non-essential travel ban is still in place. Governor Inslee has not lifted the non-essential travel ban. A significant amount of recent weekly ferry traffic has come from islanders headed to the mainland. Please remember that this is not the time to go to the mainland for non-essential visits, or to invite friends from off-island to come visit.

Yes, there may be some visitors to the islands. We're actively discouraging it, the Governor clearly limits it, and the majority of lodging owners in the islands are following the rules banning short term accommodations. But, we still see folks who are clearly not part of our year round community. Please keep in mind that not everyone you don't recognize, with kids not in our schools, or who is driving a shiny car is a tourist. It is hard to quantify, but it appears that the vast majority of second homes in the islands are currently occupied by their owners (which is more than 40% of total island residences). Ferry traffic is still way down, but clearly Memorial Day weekend might see an upward trend. It is a very delicate thing to balance, because we are absolutely discouraging short term visits, but we also think that operating from a place of fear and accusation negatively impacts our collective mental health over the long term. Hopefully we'll all continue to support and encourage those who do the right thing.

State Parks in the San Juan Islands are open with the intent of being for residents' day use only.

There's no camping. No large gatherings. And until non-essential travel is allowed in Washington, people shouldn't be coming from off-island to visit our State Parks. The focus is to let local residents enjoy all of our public lands in San Juan County. San Juan County Land Bank, National Historic Park, BLM, and other public lands in San Juan County have been open throughout, and will remain so.

Memorial Day BBQ? Yes, by all means! But please remember that all activities need to be with immediate household members only. Activities with those outside of your household create new avenues for virus transmission and could keep us from moving forward.

Going to the market or for restaurant take out? Great! Remember please, for your safety, your neighbor's safety and the safety of the people working to serve your needs, face coverings are strongly recommended (and required as soon as County goes to Phase 2) and must be covering both your nose and mouth.

Going boating? Boating, like many other outdoor activities, is fine as long as it only includes people from your immediate household. People from outside of your immediate household create opportunities for virus transmission, serious illness and prolonging the islands' recovery process.

High risk individuals should take special care. Anyone over 65, or those younger but with high risk factors like asthma, diabetes, hypertension, kidney, liver or heart disease, or who are immunocompromised or obese should be on high alert. [More info from the CDC is available here.](#)

With your commitment and work the San Juan Islands have minimized disease spread. You have done an excellent job and we all want to move forward and restart our lives as soon as it is safe to do so.

Enjoy your Memorial Day weekend and please be safe, stay healthy and have fun.