

HOT TOPIC #40: January 12, 2021

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

Governor's New Two Phase Plan and What it Means for SJC

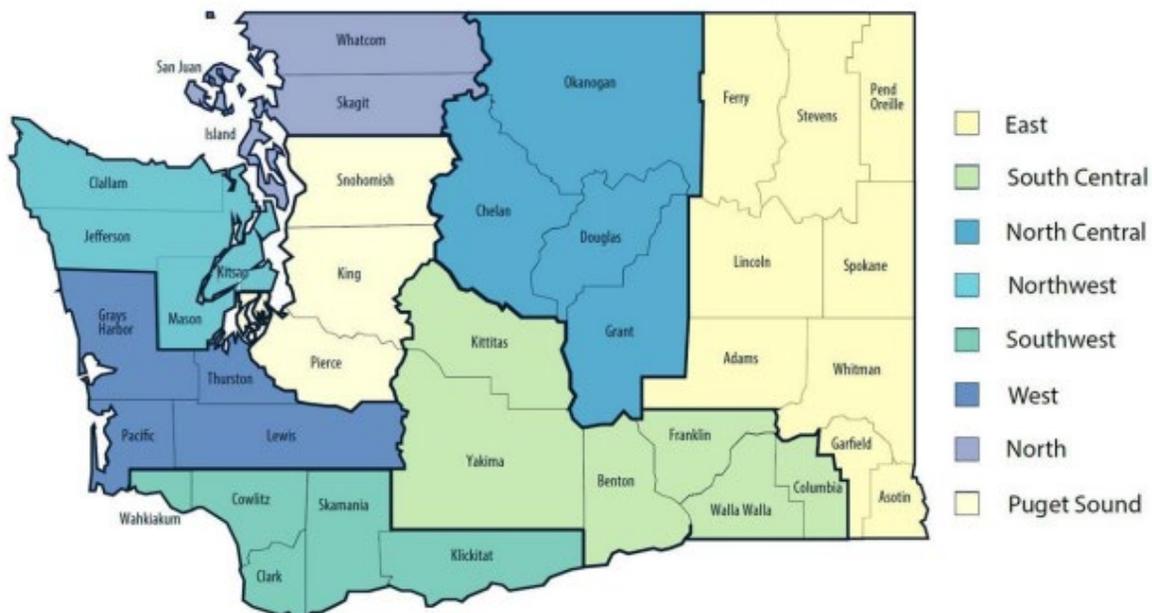
Last week Governor Inslee released details on what is being called the "Roadmap to Recovery". This is the initial piece is a two phased approach to taking a first step towards a limited reopening of some businesses and a return of some activities.

Below are some the answers to some common questions we're hearing about this plan:

QUESTION: What are the basics?

In brief, all Counties begin in Phase 1, which is very similar to the restrictions currently in place in San Juan County ([here are full details](#)). As per the Governor's plan, in order move to Phase 2, four health metrics must be met on a regional basis.

For San Juan County, our region (the North Region) includes Whatcom, Skagit, and Island Counties (see map below). Once in Phase 2, the same metrics must be maintained in order to avoid rolling back to Phase 1. Some highlights of Phase 2 include: indoor dining at 25%, indoor fitness facilities at 25%, and a further loosening on restrictions on sports. For full details, [please review this graphic](#).



QUESTION: What Phase is San Juan County in now, and what are the specifics?

As of January 11th, all counties in WA are in Phase 1. WA DOH will release a weekly report on Fridays that updates the metrics and indicates whether any counties will be moving between phases.

[The report for January 8th is online here](#). Links to future reports should be available on the [WA DOH Risk Assessment Dashboard](#).

QUESTION: What is the difference between the old Phase 2, where San Juan County was previously and the new Phase 1, where we are now?

For the most part the two are identical. The main change is that last week while we were in Phase 2 of the old plan, the rule was:

Social Gatherings – gather with no more than 5 people outside your household per week

The new rule during the current Phase 1 is:

Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Indoor: Prohibited

Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Outdoor: Max of 10 people from outside your household, limit 2 households.

So, in summary - no indoor gatherings with those outside of your household.

QUESTION: Are these phases different than the vaccine eligibility phases? Is there a direct connection between the two?

No, and it was a case of poor judgment to use the same terminology for two very different things. Maybe WA DOH will adjust, but for now we're going to avoid causing further confusion and stick with using "phase" to describe both vaccine eligibility groups and the reopening status of counties.

QUESTION: What about the earlier four phase plan that controlled what could be open in WA State? Is this related to that plan?

No, this is a new plan. Same general terminology, but the specifics of the plan vary. In general, this new approach is more objective and less subjective. Hopefully this will reduce some of the inconsistencies and occasional gaps in logic of the previous plan.

QUESTION: What exactly are the metrics being measured?

There are some very specific data that WA DOH is using to calculate phases.

- **Decreasing trend in two-week rate of COVID-19 cases** per 100K population (decrease >10%)
- **Decreasing trend in two-week rate new COVID-19 hospital admission** rates per 100K population (decrease >10%)
- **Intensive Care Unit (ICU) hospital bed occupancy** (total — COVID-19 and non-COVID-19) **of less than 90%**

- **COVID-19 test positivity rate of <10%**

QUESTION: Why is San Juan County being tied to other counties? Given our relatively low case rate, doesn't this hurt the islands?

The switch to a regional approach is a change in tactics for the Governor and WA DOH. There are several reasons:

-For small counties (like San Juan County), small swings in the number of cases can cause the county's overall metrics to vary wildly. This could mean one week we're in Phase 1, the next in Phase 2, and then back to Phase 1, and so on and so on. One goal of the regional approach is to even out this extreme variability.

-Perhaps more importantly, one of the metrics is hospital bed availability. Given that all individuals with serious medical conditions are transported to the mainland, the health of San Juan County is impacted by availability of beds in neighboring counties.

-Regionalization has also been found to help eliminate the inconsistencies of a more local approach. Previous systems resulted in one county being in Phase 3, and an adjacent one in Phase 1. That ended up causing some residents of the high-risk county to go to their neighboring low risk county to eat out, visit a bar, or attend a movie or concert. Not surprisingly, before you know it both counties are in Phase 3. For a much more detailed look at this, [this study provides some science behind the decision](#).

-It is also clear that a regional approach is more effective at limiting spread. While the islands are more isolated from their neighbors than most places, there are still lots of islanders who travel back and forth from the mainland for a host of reasons. What happens in Skagit or Whatcom matters in San Juan.

QUESTION: So, it is possible that we could move to Phase 2, and then if our metrics worsened, we would automatically drop back to Phase 1?

Yes.

QUESTION: What comes after Phase 2?

There are no details yet on what this plan looks like beyond Phase 2. No doubt it will remain unknown until some counties in WA are in Phase 2 and case counts have started to truly stabilize.

QUESTION: Does this plan address school reopening in any way?

No. However it does address the reopening of sports.