

HOT TOPIC #46: March 18, 2021

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

Phases & Tiers: Increased Vaccine Eligibility and Reopening

Info below will attempt to provide some context around two recent State level decisions that may impact islanders.

The first one we'll address is the new eligibility rules for vaccine distribution. After that, we'll look at the pending move to Phase 3 in the Governor's reopening plan.

As most are aware, until now vaccine eligibility has primarily been limited to medical providers, K-12 and childcare providers, and those over the age of 65. As of March 17th, eligibility has been expanded to the following groups (Phase 1b, Tier 2):

- Those who are pregnant and over the age of 16 ([here is more information on this subject from CDC](#))
- Those with a high-risk disability, including: Down syndrome, an intellectual or developmental disability, deaf, or blind.

In addition, the following groups of essential workers are now eligible ([full details are here](#), note: information below has been simplified to reflect San Juan County's situation):

- Workers in grocery stores/food banks who have a high-volume interaction with co-workers.
- Staff in court and corrections facilities.
- First responders who have not previously been vaccinated.
- Public Transit providers who operate vans, taxis, aircraft, etc. with four or more passengers for more than 3 or more hours per day. Office staff are not included.
- Congregate agricultural workers or food-processing employees (including those working in the seafood industry) who work in environments that involve high-volume interaction with co-workers for extended periods in situations without the ability to socially distance.

It is important to note that the following groups are **not** eligible in Tier 2:

- Essential workers for work settings not specifically mentioned above, including restaurants, utilities, government, construction, etc.
- Those with high risk medical conditions who do not have one of the high-risk disabilities listed above.
- Agricultural workers who work in settings with low interaction with co-workers and/or who are able to maintain social distancing. The primary goal of the agricultural worker eligibility tier is to vaccinate those working shoulder to shoulder in high-density large-scale food production operations.

There are still a number of 65+ San Juan County residents who have yet to be vaccinated. As always, islanders should be thoughtful in their decision making around whether they are eligible to receive a vaccination. The focus should always be on those who are clearly eligible.

The vaccine effort is moving ahead with speed, and current estimates are that eligibility will be opened to anyone who wants the vaccine by April 30th. Clearly that timeline could change, but it is an encouraging sign as we look ahead.

Governor Inslee recently announced that on March 22nd, all of Washington would be moving to Phase 3 in the reopening plan. Many of the details and supporting documents are still under development by the State, but a general overview based on what info is available regarding the new guidance is:

- Restaurants, gyms, bowling alleys and other businesses can operate at 50% capacity, up from 25%.
- Table size at restaurants has increased to 10, with no household restrictions. [Full details for eating and drinking establishments are available here.](#)
- Indoor and outdoor gatherings are allowed at 50% capacity, with no more than 400 participants, so long as physical distancing and mask requirements are followed.
- Outdoor sporting events can allow spectators at 25% of capacity. This includes professional sports teams in WA.
- Some existing requirements around youth sports will be relaxed.

Full guidance is still in development, but will be available on [Governor's Reopening Guidance page](#) once available.

Another notable change is that the metrics used to evaluate what Phase is active are shifting, and the former regional approach to measuring has been scrapped for a County specific model.

Evaluations will happen every three weeks (first is scheduled for April 12th). San Juan County will need to meet the following metrics to remain in Phase 3:

- A 14-day average of less than 30 new cases.
- A 7-day average of less than 3 hospitalizations.

If at any point more than 90% of ICU beds across WA are occupied, the entire state will roll back to Phase 2.

These are all welcome developments. With continued thoughtfulness, hopefully San Juan County and the State of Washington will avoid any increase of cases that would lead to a rollback of these measures.

