

HOT TOPIC #47: April 1, 2021

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

Straight Talk for Right Now

First off, though it was slightly tempting to combine COVID and April Fools' Day, in the end good judgment won out. The info below is very real.

These Hot Topic updates have always tried to take complex information and make it simple, and to take vague, conflicting, and confusing guidance and pull out the common sense. We'll see how we do.

FACT #1: Cases are rising across the United States, Washington, and here in San Juan County.

FACT #2: No one knows for sure how steep this next wave of cases will be or how long it will last. The expectation is that it could be severe (variants + very relaxed precautions = more COVID), but the hope is that it will diminish by late spring (increased vaccine rates).

FACT #3: Good news: a majority of our most vulnerable citizens are now vaccinated. This will drastically reduce the number of deaths and should greatly diminish the strain on our healthcare systems.

FACT #4: Everyone, regardless of age, should be doing all they can to avoid COVID infection. COVID can still be a harrowing and long-lasting experience for anyone, even those who are not "high risk" or who have a "mild" case. The science is evolving quickly on "Long COVID", but potentially 25% or more of those with mild COVID can still experience symptoms long after infection ([go here if you want to dig into this in more detail](#)). This is true for all age groups – even those between 18-40 years old.

FACT #5: A number of variants are spreading rapidly, including here in Washington. Some of these variants are quite concerning, potentially spreading more easily, and having higher fatality rates.

FACT #6: Good news: all of the vaccines appear to do a good job of preventing hospitalization and death from COVID, regardless of the strain of COVID.

FACT #7: Vaccine supply continues to be limited, and demand is still high. Fortunately, access continues to increase and hopefully will accelerate in the weeks to come.

Ok, enough facts. Let's put this in context.

1. GET VACCINATED AS SOON AS YOU CAN. Why?

- Getting COVID is bad and puts you at risk for serious long-term health impacts, regardless of age.
- There are specific benefits for those who are vaccinated regarding quarantine, socializing, and travel. See #3 below for more info.
- The variants develop in people infected with the disease. There is potential for a variant to evolve that eludes the vaccines. The more people vaccinated, the less likely this is to happen.

- Getting infected and spreading the disease can seriously impact others – including kids, who won't be vaccinated for some time to come ([and yes, some kids get very sick from COVID](#)).
- The sooner we're all vaccinated, the sooner we get back to normal. The sooner businesses can fully reopen, the sooner schools can return to regular operations, the sooner we can go watch a sporting event, go to a movie, or have a regular 4th of July parade.
- Those who aren't vaccinated will likely face long term restrictions around travel, access to specific events or work settings, etc.

2. IT IS TOO SOON TO GIVE UP ON OUR COVID PRECAUTIONS

- For the same reasons we need to get vaccinated, we need to continue masking up and avoiding high risk behavior. Preventing infections is always the goal.

3. I'M FULLY VACCINATED, WHAT CAN I DO?

- You can socialize unmasked with others who are also vaccinated.
- You can socialize unmasked with others from a single household who are not vaccinated.
- If you are exposed to someone who tests positive, you do not need to quarantine.
- You can feel more at peace with your situation and the risks you choose to take. But your decisions still matter, and keep in mind the comfort and safety of those not yet vaccinated.

4. SPRING BREAK! MY FAMILY AND I ARE TRAVELING, WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- [Look at this simple guide](#) to help you understand how to make good decisions around travel and keeping the islands safe.