

HOT TOPIC #53: July 30, 2021

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

VACCINES ARE STILL THE BEST PROTECTION AGAINST COVID-19

We're over a year and a half into this pandemic. We've learned a lot. We know how to keep people safe and now we have even better tools to do so. Being fully vaccinated remains the best protection. [Healthcare providers and pharmacies on San Juan, Orcas, and Lopez Islands are offering COVID vaccine appointments.](#) If you are not yet fully vaccinated please schedule an appointment with one of our local providers as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, vaccination rates have slowed down throughout the state. This is a concerning trend as unvaccinated people are fueling the latest surge in cases, which poses a risk to all of us. Remember that children under 12 are not able to be vaccinated yet, and therefore, are counting on those around them to keep them protected from COVID.

Why are people still getting COVID if they are vaccinated?

People can still become infected with the COVID-19 virus even if they are vaccinated.

When someone tests positive and is fully vaccinated, we call these breakthrough cases. Breakthrough cases are expected with any vaccine since no vaccine is 100% effective. The COVID vaccines *are* extraordinarily effective at preventing severe illness and death. More than 94% of all cases, deaths and hospitalizations in people 12 years or older from Washington state can be attributed to those who have **not** been fully vaccinated.

What do we know about the Delta variant?

What we currently know about the Delta variant is that it causes higher infection rates in people who are not fully vaccinated (1 in 10 people who only have a single dose of mRNA vaccines are protected against the Delta variant). Those who are fully vaccinated are protected from infection at rates of 90-95% (9 in 10 people fully vaccinated are protected). It spreads more than twice as easily from one person to another. It will take more time for us to fully understand the new variants and the specific infection risks associated with them.

The Delta variant is in Washington state with over 50% of the new cases being attributed to this variant. The breakthrough cases we had in our county earlier this month are currently in the process of genetic testing to see if they were the Delta variant. Those results won't be available for several more weeks.

OTHER WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Whether vaccinated or not, there are still other ways to protect yourself and others. These are the same tools that we've had since the beginning of the pandemic, and we know they work.

1. **Mask Up Indoors** – Whether you're vaccinated or not, mask up indoors. This will help slow the spread of the disease, especially in public spaces where the vaccination status of those around you are unknown.
2. **Travel Smart** – Traveling, either locally or beyond, means greater chances of exposure, especially to COVID-19 variants. Our county has high vaccination rates, but in more than half the counties in the US, rates are below 40%. Know the case and vaccination rates where you are traveling. Limit exposures in areas with high transmission and/or low vaccination rates.

3. ***Socially Distance*** – When in public areas, maintain six feet distance from the people around you.
4. ***Stay Home When Sick*** – When ill, stay home, don't go to work, dinner with friends or other social activities. Common COVID-19 symptoms include fever, cough, headache, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, fatigue, sore throat, congestion, nausea or vomiting, muscle and body aches and diarrhea.
5. ***Avoid High Risk Activities*** – Crowded events, especially indoors, remain an extremely high risk of getting infected with COVID.
6. ***Opt Outdoors*** – If you are meeting with friends, especially with friends from out of town, opt outdoors for your hang out. Have a picnic, go on a hike, or meet at the beach!

MASK RECOMMENDATION

San Juan County Health Officer Dr. Frank James joined seven other counties' Health Officers to release a joint recommendation for indoor masking. See the [full release](#) for more details about this recommendation.

Why am I being asked to mask again if I'm vaccinated?

There is increased disease transmission across the state. *We are recommending that you wear a mask indoors, even if you're vaccinated BECAUSE there are not enough vaccinated people to keep this virus at bay.* Until more people are vaccinated statewide and countrywide, we will continue to see disease transmission at these high rates. Masking indoors will help slow the spread until vaccination rates are higher.

THE ROAD AHEAD

High vaccination coverage will reduce spread of the virus and help prevent new variants from emerging. While San Juan County's vaccination rate is over 70%, only 51% of those in Washington state who are eligible to receive vaccines are considered fully vaccinated. As the percentage of fully vaccinated people increases, we anticipate that the overall case, hospitalization and death counts across the state will begin to decline.

While we are seeing case numbers similar to the wave we experienced last summer, there are over 70% fewer deaths in Washington. This is due the effectiveness of the COVID vaccines. The science is clear: the way out of this pandemic is high vaccination rates.

Mask up, islanders! We can do this!