



MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 24, 2021

Weekly Case Update

Since the [last update](#) on Friday December 17th, there have been 13 new confirmed or probable cases in San Juan County. Current case count is now 479. However, there are a number of suspect cases currently under investigation that are not yet counted in the total case count pending confirming test results, but may contribute to a spike in case numbers in the days ahead.

There are approximately six unvaccinated close contacts of positive cases currently in quarantine in the islands. Six of the thirteen new cases have been identified as being fully vaccinated.

LOPEZ ISLAND: There are five new cases on Lopez Island since the last update, all of which are tied either directly or indirectly to a previously reported case. There are seven positive cases under active monitoring on Lopez Island at this time.

ORCAS ISLAND: There are five new cases on Orcas Island since the last update. There are seven positive cases under active monitoring on Orcas Island. Note that there is an active outbreak investigation underway on Orcas at this time tied to a holiday gathering. More cases are anticipated.

SAN JUAN ISLAND: There are two new cases on San Juan Island since the last update. There are two positive cases under active monitoring on San Juan Island at this time.

NOTE: There is also one new case tied to Decatur Island, but the individual is isolating at a mainland location and there is no exposure risk to the Decatur community.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

There is a strong sense within the local public health contact tracing team that WA and San Juan County are on the verge of a significant surge in cases. Whether it happens this coming week, or soon after, it seems clear that the Omicron variant will lead to many more infections. While the severity of illness from this new variant is unknown (initial signs suggesting it is somewhat less severe than Delta are encouraging), the sheer number of cases happening all at once will likely lead to a significant drain on healthcare resources. Please review the info below in advance of the anticipated surge.

1. Being vaccinated continues to offer significant protection from severe illness and is the single most effective way to help reduce your chances of ending up in the hospital from COVID. Many local and mainland providers continue to offer doses, and the current schedule and registration links for upcoming County vaccine clinics is at <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1737/COVID-Vaccine-Info>. January booster clinics will be posted to website next week.
2. The County Health & Community Services team gave away more than 3,000 mail in test kits last week. For those who received those kits, please note that the expiration date for those kits that were due to expire 12/21 has been extended out one year by the manufacturer. The County and some local providers are actively working with WA DOH and the federal government to secure more at-home testing kits. Details will be provided when

additional info is available.

3. From the very beginning of the pandemic the local Health and Community Services contact tracing and surveillance teams have taken tremendous pride in the high level of attention and effort they have put into managing the risk of spread from every positive case that is reported. Please note that as cases spike due to Omicron, the teams will likely be unable to support that high level of service. Email may replace phone calls as the primary form of outreach, staff may be less available or unavailable to answer individual questions, and those who test positive may be asked to do the notification of their close contacts themselves and to share info provided by Health & Community Services staff. Islanders are asked to be patient and understanding of the limitations placed on the response due to a potentially record volume of cases.
4. If cases spike as expected, WA and San Juan County residents may expect increased limits on activities. Specifics of what those limits may look like are unknown, but they may include increased testing or vaccination requirements in some settings, limits on social gatherings, or scaling back of activities that may be seen as high risk. Hopefully the spike in cases won't lead to a dramatic strain on hospitals but given the relatively large number of individual choosing to remain unvaccinated, it seems likely that it will. If there is good news in this, it is that initial data suggests that the Omicron spike will be over relatively quickly, perhaps in just a few weeks. If so, that suggests that any new limits may be somewhat short in duration.

As always, the Health & Community Services team is tremendously appreciative of the ongoing support, patience, and cooperation of the community. The current situation is not what any of us wanted, but the islands continue to shine amidst the struggle, and our team wishes all islanders a safe, warm, and peaceful holidays.