



MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 31, 2021

Weekly Case Update

NOTE: the situation is changing quickly and cases are increasing. This will be a long update, but please read the entire document. There are a number of critical details that it is important the community be aware of. Thank you!

Since the [last update](#) on Friday December 24th, there have been 54 new confirmed or probable cases in San Juan County. Current case count is now 533.

There are approximately seven unvaccinated close contacts of positive cases currently in quarantine in the islands.

LOPEZ ISLAND: There is one new case on Lopez Island since the last update. There are four positive cases under active monitoring on Lopez Island at this time.

ORCAS ISLAND: There are forty-six new cases on Orcas Island since the last update. There are forty-four positive cases under active monitoring on Orcas Island. Approximately thirty-one of these new cases are tied in some way to the ongoing outbreak, including some suspected tertiary contacts (people infected by people who were infected by people who were at the original event).

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

OVERALL PICTURE:

Clearly there has been a surge in the number of infections. The expectation is that this increase will accelerate rapidly over the next couple of weeks across all islands. Case numbers nationally, and for WA State overall, are spiking dramatically. A number of WA Counties are seeing their largest case numbers to date.

There is some good news:

1. San Juan County's high vaccination and booster rates mean that the islands are in a better position to weather the impact from the Omicron variant than nearly anywhere else in the world. While being fully vaccinated may offer less protection against infection than earlier strains, vaccination does offer a very high level of protection against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
2. Early data suggests that the Omicron strain may be less severe than earlier versions of the disease. Though its high degree of infectiousness means that a large number of unvaccinated individuals will likely become severely ill in the weeks to come (putting significant strain on our healthcare systems), Omicron is potentially a major step towards a version of COVID that is much easier to live with over the long term.
3. While it is too soon to know for sure, it appears that the Omicron surge is likely to decline on the back end nearly as quickly as it ramps up. Predicting the future when it comes to COVID is a bit of a risky proposition, but it does appear that this impending spike of cases may be over relatively quickly.

Some critical things to keep in mind:

1. Getting vaccinated is vital, and you don't need to be fully vaccinated to obtain significant protection. Just getting your first shot immediately dramatically decreases your chances of becoming seriously ill. Talk to your local

medical provider about getting your shot, or register for an upcoming vaccine clinic at:

<https://www.sanjuanco.com/1737/COVID-Vaccine-Info>

2. Face coverings: cloth masks offer far less protection than other kinds of masks. Wearing a N-95 or KN-95 is the gold standard. KN-95 masks are currently available commercially. Your next best option is to wear a paper mask with a cloth mask over it. Anyone working in an environment with a high degree of contact with the public should be wearing more than a simple cloth mask.
3. Testing: given the enormous spike in cases across the United State, access to testing is becoming extremely limited. Islanders may become ill and be unable to confirm whether they have COVID. Given the impending surge in cases, anyone experiencing COVID-like symptoms should assume they have COVID and isolate themselves from others appropriately. The County and some local providers are actively working to secure a large supply of tests. More information will be made available as that effort evolves.
4. When sick: for the vast majority of people, especially those who are fully vaccinated (including a booster shot), the new COVID variant will be experienced as a bad cold. However, some unvaccinated or high-risk individuals may develop more severe illness. Here's what to look for:
 - A.) For many people who develop severe COVID, their symptoms worsen on day 7, 8, or 9 after initial symptom onset. Symptoms may be quite mild for a number of days, and then deteriorate quickly.
 - B.) Pulse oximeters are available commercially (for about \$20-30) and are the single most effective tool for monitoring your condition. If pulse oximeter reading drops below 94%, call your doctor, if it drops below 90%, call 911.
 - C.) COVID infection may cause a range of symptoms, and anyone who feels their condition is worsening or becoming concerning should reach out to their healthcare provider but increasing shortness of breath and/or chest pain are clear signs of needing medical evaluation.
5. Stay home when you're sick. Please don't go to work, socialize with others, or go to school if you're experiencing symptoms, no matter how mild. Most outbreaks begin when people ignore symptoms that seem relatively benign.
6. Omicron spreads VERY easily. We had numerous situations earlier in pandemic where a family member would be infected, but their family did not get the disease. We are now seeing that having one infected person almost always leads to the entire household becoming ill. Protecting those we care about most requires a higher level of attention. Now is not the time for New Year's parties or other unmasked indoor events.
7. Know that as case numbers rise, the Health Department will not have the staff to carefully contact trace, inform, and monitor every infected islander. We all need to understand that if we're sick and know or suspect we have COVID that we need to stay home, minimize our exposure to others, and make good decisions. We can consider ourselves no longer infectious ten days after our symptoms started, or five days after symptom onset if we test negative on day five or later. If we do need to go out during our infectious period, MASK UP (see #2 above!) and make every effort to protect those around you and avoid exposing others.
8. It is too soon to know how much strain this new surge will place on our healthcare systems, but it is almost certain to affect access to care to some degree, and perhaps will lead to major reductions in service. Islanders need to understand that access to both routine and critical care may be limited or unavailable in the weeks to come.

REALITY CHECK:

Many of us will come down with COVID and that's scary. We've been working so hard to keep it at bay, this new variant is spreading wildly, and the idea of being infected is very uncomfortable. But we need to keep in mind that if we're vaccinated and being thoughtful about our interactions with others, there is a very high chance that our COVID infection will be mild and be over without incident. There is no need to panic. Calm, thoughtful, compassionate care for ourselves and each other will continue to see us through.

And with any luck 2022 will see us to the end of this roller coaster ride. Happy New Years islanders!