



MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

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SAN JUAN COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER JOINS REGIONAL EFFORT TO CURB RISING INFECTION RATES – MASKS RECOMMENDED INDOORS FOR ALL

As a part of a regional effort to curb the rising infection rates in Washington, San Juan County Health Officer Dr. Frank James recommends that islanders mask up when entering an indoor public space, including businesses, whether vaccinated or not.

[Local Health Officers in counties adjacent to the Salish Sea are coming together to put forward this masking recommendation.](#) The participating Health Officers to date are from Pierce, King, Snohomish, Kitsap, Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor and San Juan counties. COVID-19 cases are rising across the region and there is increased circulation of the highly transmissible Delta variant.

This is not a new or separate mandate for businesses. It is already a requirement for unvaccinated people to wear a mask. This recommendation does encourage businesses to ask all people to mask up when entering the space to help protect workers and the community.

“Remember that the primary behavioral problem we are addressing is unvaccinated people not wearing masks,” says Dr. James. “To ensure easy verification that all unvaccinated people are masked in indoor settings, we need to have all people mask in indoor public settings. Recommending that proprietors of public indoor venues require masking for all is a key part of what we need to do at this time.”

Virus variants are expected to occur. [There are four notable variants in the United States that are being monitored by the CDC.](#) Most notable for San Juan County and our region is the Delta variant. The county’s recent breakthrough cases (infection in vaccinated individuals) are showing similar viral behavior to the Delta variant. This is a troubling development because the Delta variant is 225% more infectious than the original virus.

San Juan County is leading the state in vaccination rates; however, there are portions of our community that are unprotected or under-protected, especially against emerging variant strains. Unvaccinated people, children under twelve and those who share a household with them should be especially diligent in wearing a mask in order to keep their loved ones safe.

As cases are on the rise nationally, regionally, and locally, San Juan County is joining the effort to keep Washingtonians safe. Until these variants are understood more, the road ahead will require a shift back to what we know works best to protect against the virus: get fully vaccinated if you haven’t done so already, mask up indoors, maintain social distancing, and minimize travel.