



## Vaccine likely coming soon to Kitsap County

By Mark Krulish

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The bad news is COVID-19 rates have continued to increase in Kitsap County heading into the final month of 2020; the good news is a vaccine could be here by the new year.

Through Tuesday there had been 2,529 confirmed cases in Kitsap, and they are coming in at a “brisk” rate of about 50 per day, said Dr. Gib Morrow, the county’s health officer.

But with news that Pfizer and Moderna are seeking emergency vaccine use authorization through the FDA, officials are urging folks to be patient and remain vigilant about their habits.

“At this point, those vaccines are on the way, but we’re not there yet, and



they're not going to help right now," Morrow said. "We need to be very careful and very mindful going into the holiday season. It's a very crucial time ... to do those things that we know do work."

Overall, the positive case rate has nearly quadrupled in the past six weeks, Morrow said. In mid-October, Kitsap was averaging about 10 new cases per day and cases per 100,000 residents in the low 40s. As of Dec. 1, Kitsap had 164 cases per 100,000 residents over the prior two weeks.

Hospitalizations have gone up as well, though Morrow said the county is still in decent shape.

"In Kitsap, we've got capacity here," he said.

### Vaccine distribution

Though it depends on approval from the Food and Drug Administration and the length of time for the process, vaccines could be in Washington state within a month. Morrow said the estimated first shipment would be about 400,000.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was approved this week for distribution in the United Kingdom.

State officials are still developing a plan as to who would be eligible for the first round of vaccines, though there is a framework in place as an interim plan was submitted to the CDC in October.

"When that vaccine is ready to go, we'll be able to distribute it within this community," Morrow said.

### Back to school?

Early draft documents that were presented to Gov. Jay Inslee earlier this month suggested changes in the state's decision tree for allowing students to return to in-person learning.

Previously reported studies, including one recently done by the Institute for Disease Modeling in Bellevue, show that younger students in particular have lower levels of transmission. The new guidance, which has not yet been approved by the state Department of Health, moves the upper limit for some in-person learning from 75 to 200 cases per 100,000. That would clear the way for Kitsap schools to bring back elementary students at their discretion, as the county is below that threshold.



“The good news in Kitsap is that currently we would be below that 200 case rate,” Morrow said. “The bad news is at the statewide level, it’s over 400, and we are a peninsula, we’re not an island.”

The Center for Disease Control is also considering new changes to its quarantine guidelines, which would allow for a “test out” at seven days — a person could get tested at about five days, and if it comes back negative, could end their quarantine with continued monitoring of symptoms. Even without testing, the recommended quarantine time is likely to be shortened to 10 days.

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