

Kitsap Sun

NEWS

COVID-19 outbreak on S'Klallam reservation connected to Thanksgiving week gatherings

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LITTLE BOSTON – A COVID-19 outbreak on the Port Gamble S'Klallam Reservation in North Kitsap has spread to at least 13 people and forced nearly 50 close contacts into isolation, the tribe said Tuesday.

The tribe said in an announcement that the 13 positive tests had come over the weekend through Tuesday, saying that nearly 10% of the households on the tribe's reservation needed to quarantine. The tribe had a round of COVID-19 tests scheduled at its community testing site for employees and community members on Wednesday.

"It did not need to be this way," the tribe said in a pointed update on its Facebook page, connecting the spread of the virus on the reservation to group gatherings.

"This past week, people got complacent," the announcement said. "They had dinners. They got together with loved ones. We're now seeing the consequences of those actions. If you're one of the affected, this notice is not meant to shame – we hope for a quick and uneventful recovery. It is important though that we all, as a community, learn from where we find ourselves right now."

In a statement released to the Kitsap Sun, tribal Chairman Jeromy Sullivan said that up until recently, there had been "very few" COVID-19 cases among staff and community members. Most of the recent cases, he said, have been tied back to gatherings among people from different households during Thanksgiving week. The tribe's rapid testing system was able to identify the cases quickly, and contact tracers sent close contacts into isolation, Sullivan said.

"The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe has been diligent about working to protect staff, the tribal community and those that visit our businesses from COVID-19," Sullivan said. "This includes setting up a robust system for testing all employees every two weeks. Through these protocols, we have been able to find cases – even those that are asymptomatic – before infection has had a chance to spread. Up until this most recent spate, there have been very few cases among our staff and community members."

The tribe was an early adopter in setting up a community testing site in May and has continued to test its employees and community members since then.

"We need you to continue to take this seriously," the tribe said in its announcement. "Staying home saves lives and ensures a lifetime more of gatherings, dinners, and holiday celebrations. It's what we all want, but that future is dictated by what we do now. Please do your part."

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