

Hello Friends,

This is a longer email, but please take the time to read through all of it:

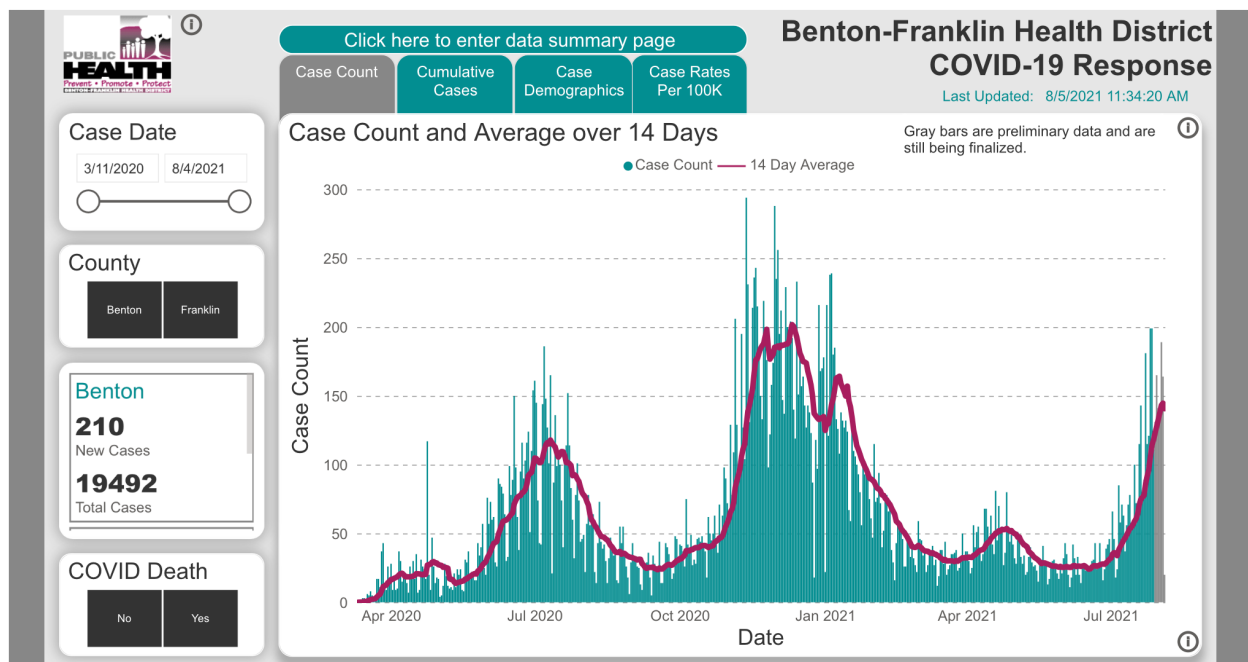
Why We Stopped Live Streaming

As you may have noticed, a few months ago we quietly stopped offering our live stream service on Facebook. With the vaccine becoming widely available and covid cases rapidly falling we began to encourage all members to be attending service in person, so we stopped posting a live stream video of the service on our Facebook account.

We had always viewed that as a temporary crutch to help us limp along till we could all gather together again since we strongly believe that [physical presence](#) is a [necessary element](#) in our corporate worship, thus we should never think that viewing a service digitally can in anyway suffice as an adequate replacement of assembling with God's people. But, given the extraordinary circumstances of our moment, we deemed it a wise and loving temporary solution till we could all gather together once more. Once those extraordinary circumstances no longer warranted the crutch, we set it aside.

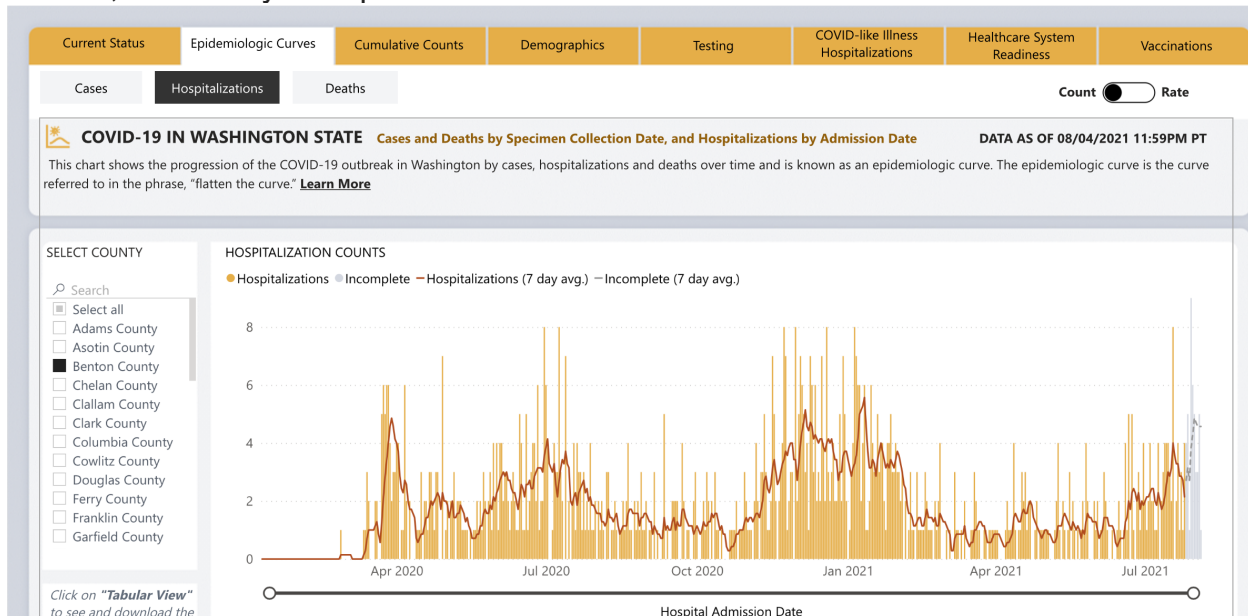
Covid on the Rise, Again

You also may have noticed that there has been a recent spike in covid cases around the country and in our own county. As of now, we are currently approaching the same rate of new infections per day that we were at during December/January, as you can see here:



Source: <https://covid19.bfhd.wa.gov/cases-and-roadmap-to-recovery/>

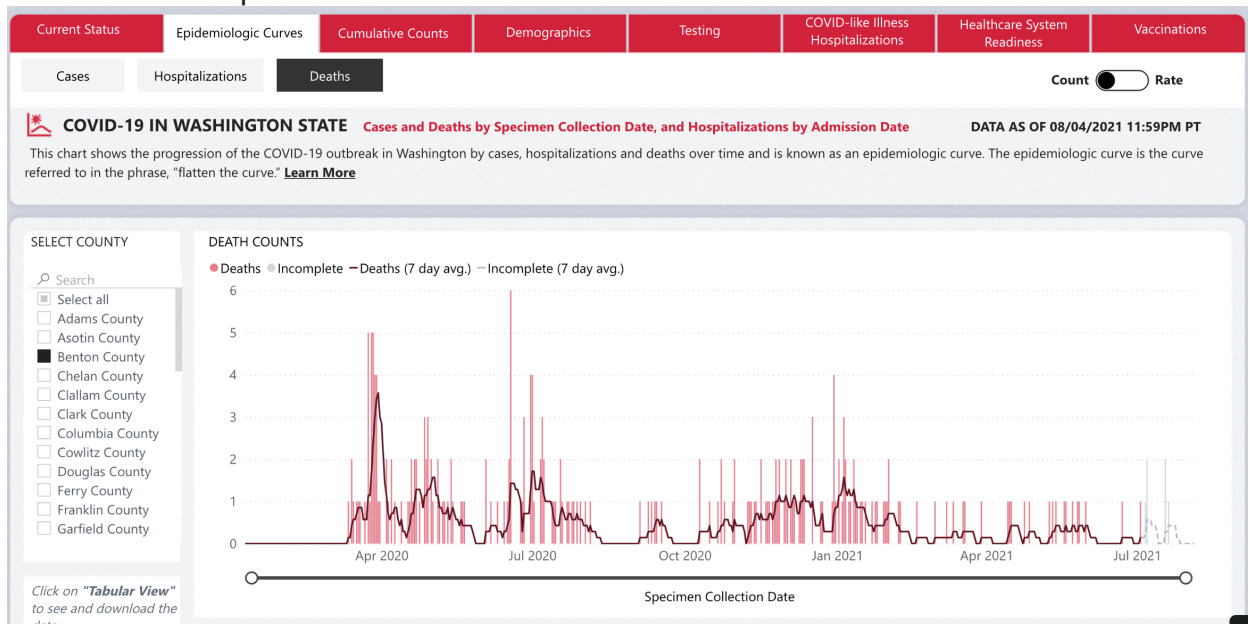
Further, our county's hospitalizations are on the rise:



Source: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>

We are told that this new surge in infections is caused by the delta variant of covid, which is much more highly contagious ([apparently on par with chicken-pox](#)).

That being said, the death rates in our county have not risen at the same rates as infections or hospitalizations:



This is likely due to the fact that the majority of the most vulnerable in society--those most likely to die if contracting covid--have been vaccinated in our county: 80% of 65+ residents (Benton county currently at a vaccination rate of 56% of 18+ residents, [source](#)). Or it could also be from a wide swath of our population already getting covid and having [built up natural immunity](#). While not impossible, both [vaccinations](#) and [antibodies from previous infections](#) make the chances of contracting the delta variant very rare.

All of That to Say

We know that there are some individuals in our congregation who have chosen for various reasons not to be vaccinated or have not already gotten covid. **As the risk of infection spreading is now much higher than before, we have decided to begin offering a live stream service again** (this time it will be through our [YouTube channel](#), not Facebook) for this group of people in our congregation so that they can not be wholly isolated from the teaching and worship on Sunday.

That being said, given the effectiveness and accessibility of vaccines and the low-risks for those who have previously had covid, **I want to encourage us--those who have been vaccinated, have antibodies, are young, healthy, not at risk for serious complications, etc.-- to prioritize attending in-person worship.** While the future is always uncertain, it seems covid will likely be a reality that is just going to be absorbed into life. It will, like all viruses, continue to mutate and change; doctors will continue to work on better therapies, better vaccines, etc.

We will never eliminate all risks in life. Every member of our church participates in a [disproportionately higher level of risk](#) by driving to church in a car than they do by sitting next to other potential carriers of covid at church. When Proverbs details the sluggard who cries out, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!" (Prov 22:13; 26:13), it is trying to show us the folly of irrational fear.

But this is no excuse for us to be reckless or casual about the real risk of covid. We should also heed the other admonition of Proverbs: "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it," (Prov 22:3; 27:12). Personally, I just received news that one of my best friend's father just died from covid. He was in his 60's, had recently had a triple by-pass heart surgery, and was unvaccinated. I am not attempting to judge whether or not he was being wise or foolish (I know very little other than what I just told you). I am only saying this to show that his risks were *very high*, and now his family is tragically left without him. Similarly, those of us with *high* risks should act cautiously. And those of us with *low* risks should act accordingly.

Our task is not to always live in a cocoon of safety nor throw caution to the wind, but to live wisely in pursuit of what the Lord has called us to do, seeking to thread the needle between what each of those Proverbs is warning us of. So, if you are at *high risk* and sense that it would be wise to stay home, then you can watch the video recording of the

service. If you are at *low risk*, then prioritize gathering with the Lord's people on the Lord's Day.

We are not requiring individuals to wear masks to attend our service, but our state has recently *suggested* that individuals wear masks while indoors. Since the vaccine has been widely available and the mask mandate lifted, we have left masking or no masking up to the individual and their conscience, but individuals may now want to again consider how to approach masking in light of the new information, especially if they are concerned about their own immunity / ability to pass on the virus to others.

I know all of this is exhausting and tiring and we all wish this would be over with. We live in a fallen world that is filled with thorns and frustrations. You can pray for the Lord to grant our church both courage and wisdom, love and discernment as we move forward.

Grace and Peace,
- Marc Sims
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