

First COVID-19 vaccine doses arrive in Oregon

By GARY A. WARNER
OREGON CAPITAL BUREAU

The first of millions of expected vaccine doses needed to control the COVID-19 virus arrived in Oregon on Monday, Dec. 14, starting a process that could last into fall 2021.

The Oregon Health Authority issued a statement that the first doses of the vaccine manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech arrived in the state at 7 a.m. on Dec. 14. Four facilities in or near Portland, along with a medical center in Ontario in Malheur County, each received a 975-dose packages on Tuesday, Dec. 15.

Caitlin Cozad, communications director for Good Shepherd Health

Care System in Hermiston, said the hospital will be following Oregon Health Authority's guidelines for vaccination order, which prioritizes health care workers and long-term care facilities.

"Over the course of the next month Good Shepherd will receive its fair share to cover all of our staff and external frontline/essential workers," she said in an email.

She added that all staff will still be required to follow personal protective equipment guidelines and other safety procedures after receiving the vaccine.

Oregon is slated to receive 35,100 doses this week. The remaining 30,225 Pfizer doses will go to unspecified hospitals later this week. Another 10,725

doses will go to unspecified skilled nursing facilities for vaccinations beginning next week.

"Today, I can tell you that help is here," said Governor Kate Brown in a statement on Dec. 14.

The vaccine's initial arrival comes as the state, like most of the nation, has seen a steep rise in COVID-19 cases since September.

As of Sunday, Dec. 13, there have been 93,853 positive cases of COVID-19 in Oregon and 1,155 deaths. Nationwide, there have been over 16.3 million cases and 300,267 deaths.

While a sign of hope, getting the vaccine to most of the more than 2.6 million estimated adults in

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

A sign directs visitors at the Good Shepherd Health Care System campus in Hermiston on Nov. 16, 2020. The hospital has a plan in place to vaccinate employees as it receives its first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine over the next month.

UPDATES

Local counties still in 'extreme risk' category

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla and Morrow counties remained on the state's "extreme risk" list for COVID-19 as Oregon Health Authority updated its assessments of each county.

In total, 29 of Oregon's 36 counties now fall under the category, one of four levels in the state's new COVID-19 restrictions. The list is updated every two weeks as OHA reevaluates the latest COVID-19 cases, test positivity and community spread of the virus.

In the seven-day period between Wednesday, Dec. 9 and Tuesday, Dec. 15, Umatilla County Public Health reported 234 new cases of COVID-19.

The county needs to get down to less than 80 cases over a 14-day period for all elementary school students to return to classrooms, and about 40 cases per 14-day period to see middle school and high school students return.

On Dec. 9, the county reported the death of a 39-year-old Umatilla County man with underlying conditions who was diagnosed with COVID-19 on Oct. 16 and died Nov. 1 at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington. On Dec. 15, it reported the death of an 89-year-old man who tested positive Nov. 20 and died Dec. 6 at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston.

According to Umatilla County Public Health's website, since the pandemic began, 14.8% of the county's COVID-19 cases have been under age 20. Just over 39% of cases have been age 20-39, 29.6% of cases have been age 40-59, 13.2% have been ages 60-79 and 2.6% have been over age 80. About 47% of cases have been female.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald/East Oregonian

Craig Dirksen, left, Emily Bonner, center, and Lori Smith pose for a portrait in the front yard of their Hermiston home on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.

Deck the halls



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Christmas lights adorn the house and yard of Craig Dirksen and Lori Smith on West Johns Avenue in Hermiston on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Christmas lights adorn the West Johns Avenue home of Craig Dirksen and Lori Smith in Hermiston on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.

Musical display adds plenty of holiday cheer to Hermiston

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As Hermiston-area residents hop in their car and go searching for the best Christmas light displays in town, Craig Dirksen and Lori Smith's house is becoming a must-see.

Dozens of cars pull up along their home on Johns Avenue or in the Desert View Elementary School parking lot kitty-corner from their property to enjoy their tens of thousands of lights, all working in sync with a musical concert more than an hour long broadcast on a loop over 88.1 FM each night from 5:30-9 p.m.

During one song, a giant Spider Man dances on a 28-foot-tall metal Christmas tree. During another, a wave of pink crosses the house at the mention of Santa Claus bringing a Barbie.

"I'm one of those 'go big or go home' people, and I'm already home so I might as well go big," Dirksen said.

Umatilla County residents interested in a tour of Christmas lights in the area can get help from an online map on bit.ly/lightupthetown-umatillacounty. The map has been curated by Hermiston Parks

IF YOU GO

Craig Dirksen's light display runs from 5:30-9 p.m. each night at 790 West Johns Ave. in Hermiston. The full concert of songs runs about an hour and fifteen minutes long, on a loop starting at 5:30 p.m. For more information, see the "Miracle on John's Avenue" Facebook page.

and Recreation and has more than 40 entries, including the Festival of Lights at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

The Festival of Lights is now a walk-through on Fridays and Saturdays from 5-11 p.m. and drive-thru only on Thursdays and Sundays from 5-10 p.m.

In Boardman, the SAGE Center at 101 Olson Road is hosting its annual musical light display every night in December from 5-10 p.m. Visitors can enjoy the display, set to music, in their vehicles while tuned in to 106.1 FM.

When it comes to private displays, however, Dirksen and Smith's home at 790 W. Johns

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