VACCINATE

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aren't old enough, or the elderly or folks' whose immune systems are compromised (such as those who've suffered from cancer)," said Andi Walsh, community relations, grants and emergency preparedness coordinator for the Center for Human Development. "There's reasons for thinking about the greater good."

In the case of an outbreak of vaccine-preventable disease in a community, the local health department has the legal authority to exclude from school or child care attendance any child who has not been completely immunized, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

"The last two summers we've had outbreaks for vaccine-preventable diseases," Walsh said. "We had mumps last year and pertussis the year before. Both mumps and pertussis were parts of communities that don't vaccinate. So when people choose not to vaccinate themselves or their children, they put the community at risk."

A rise in concern for both the necessity and health risks associated with vaccinations has been at the forefront of discussion and debate in recent years, most notably with claims that vaccines cause autism, contain unsafe toxins, or are no longer needed due to herd immunity or lack of presence.

"All parents want to do the best thing we can for our kids. The majority of parents have the best intentions of what is the safest thing for their children," Walsh said. "You have the science-based side of vaccines versus another portion of folks who feel that vaccines cause problems to their children, so they choose not to vaccinate because they feel it's a health issue, (as compared to) what happens if (they) don't vaccinate."

An overwhelming majority of these concerns, however, can be debunked. Vaccines, like all medical interventions, have the potential to cause harm. It's important to note that no vaccine recommended for use has been found to be more harmful than the disease it helps prevent, according to Boost Oregon Vaccination Education, and those that have proven ineffective in the past have been pulled from the market and replaced with safer alternatives.

"Every medication that people take has risks for side effects; however, vaccinations are some of the most tested products on the medical market," said Elizabeth Sieders, RN, and immunization coordinator and communicable disease investigator for CHD. "Each vaccine undergoes extensive clinical research before they are approved for use, and then continue to be monitored closely. Every vaccine reaction that occurs in the U.S. is documented for the use of studying what potential threats they could pose to humans."

Another term that frequents vaccination debate and defense of non-vaccination is "herd immunity," a concept that Sieders said is used to describe when a community of people are vaccinated, or immune to a disease, and therefore provide protection to its members who aren't vaccinated by limiting the possibility of bringing the disease into their community.

"Some diseases, pertussis for example, which we have had outbreaks of often in Eastern Oregon, requires a 90 to 95 percent vaccination rate in a group of people to protect its most vulnerable populations," Sieders said. "If children do not get immunized, that herd immunity will be lost. As herd immunity declines and rates of non-vaccinated children increase, diseases that have previously not been seen for many many years will likely return. We saw this with the outbreak of mumps last year in our county. Diseases spread easily in large groups of people who spend extended time together, such as schools, and the more unvaccinated children there are the more potential (there is) for outbreaks to occur."

Though the presence of vaccine-preventable diseases remains largely unseen in Oregon and the rest of the United States, save for minor outbreaks, it doesn't mean they have been eradicated. Smallpox is the only infectious disease to have ever been eradicated, according to the World Health Organization, and took decades to accomplish. If the vaccination of a certain disease ceases within a community, that disease is likely to return.

"We have been very fortunate in the U.S. to be able to go generations without seeing crippling disease outbreaks, and because of that I think we, as a general population, do not take the risks of these diseases serious,"
Sieders said. "Many of the vaccine-preventable diseases can and do cause death, and because of the incubation period of most viruses it is impossible to just isolate yourself from infected persons. While vaccines are not perfect at creating immunity to diseases, they do increase your chances of not contracting the diseases exponentially."

"These are scary things," seconded Walsh, "things people don't even realize are scary because they haven't seen them in their lifetime."

Though it is a parent's right to exempt their child(ren) from one or more state-required vaccines, both Walsh and Sieders agree that decision should be a highly-informed one.

"What is important for parents to consider is if the risks of vaccination outweigh the risks of contracting a vaccine preventable disease," Sieders said. "Statistically, the diseases vaccines treat cause much more harm, every year."

Walsh gives parents this advice: "Be sure to check reliable sources. Get both sides of the picture before you make a decision. Visit with your medical providers and get input from them and think about the consequences down the road. If you choose not to vaccinate, are you willing to take the risk of when your child does contract that disease? Is it worth the risk?"

While the issue of immunization largely focuses on children, adults are also encouraged to be aware of their immunization status and stay up-to-date if they either didn't receive a vaccination as a child or to receive boosters, as protection may wane under certain conditions such as childbirth, according to Walsh.

For more information concerning vaccination, contact your local health care provider or the Center for Human Development in La Grande, and visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at cdc.gov, the Oregon Health Authority at oregon.gov/oha or boostoregon.org.

Contact Audrey Love at 541-963-3161 or email alove@lagrandeobserver.com.

WAGNER

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deal with such issues because enrollment is critical to the school district's future.

"It is a good dilemma to have," Justice said.

Wagner began his career with the La Grande School District in 2010 when he joined the La Grande Middle School staff. He taught sixth grade at LMS for two years before becoming a math teacher, where he instructed students in seventh and eighth grades.

"My time as a teacher is something I will always cherish," Wagner said.

Fellow faculty who were impressed with Wagner's work at LMS include social studies teacher Klel Carson, who credits him with being able to connect with young people.

"He has such a good rapport with kids. He cares a lot," Carson said. "He is a good people person."

Central Elementary School Principal Suzy Mayes also speaks highly of Wagner.

"I'm very excited to have Chris as our very first part-time vice principal. His integrity, values and leadership skills are impeccable," Mayes said. "Our school community is thrilled to have such a leader with us at Central."

Wagner will join LMS's administrative team of Principal Kyle McKinney and Assistant Principal Brett Jackman, both of whom work full time at the middle school.

McKinney taught math at La Grande High School before becoming LMS principal and his students included Wagner, who grew up in La Grande and is a 2002 LHS graduate.

Wagner said he has learned a lot about school leadership from McKinney and Jackman.

"I've learned effective ways to communicate with staff members to help them grow and succeed, how to work with parents and deal with difficult situations," Wagner said.

Wagner has a bachelor of science degree in English literature from Eastern Oregon University as well as a master of teacher education degree, also from EOU. He is now earning a specialists degree in educational leadership from Northwest Nazarene University. He said that as an assistant principal he wants to work to make sure new mandates and new policies handed down from the state level are instituted in a manner that best benefits students.

"It is important that they be effective for kids," Wagner said.

He plans to do all he can to make sure that students are prepared to do well in the job market in the next century.

"I want to provide them with a platform for understanding the world," he said.

Wagner said he is looking forward to working with La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza. Wagner said he is impressed with Mendoza's ideas and plans for the school district.

Wagner is not the only educator in his immediate family. His wife, Holly, is a third-grade teacher at Island City Elementary School. They have two sons, Bryce, 12, and Caleb, 8, and a daughter, Aubri, 6. All attend schools in the La Grande School District.

"We really enjoy traveling together and sharing new experiences," Chris Wagner said.

Wagner will begin his new duties Aug. 6. Justice, noting that Wagner is highly regarded among educators, is confident Wagner will need little time to get up to speed.

"He should thrive in his new role," Justice said.

RETIRE

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That was the same year he said he got involved with research that tracks wolf and cattle interaction. For 10 years Williams traveled the Pacific Northwest lecturing about the wolf-cattle interaction research and the impact of wolves on Oregon's livestock community.

When the Environmental Protection Agency took over feedlot inspection responsibilities from the state, Williams said, some operators were being assessed big fines. In response to the industry threat, OSU Extension agreed to educate producers and Williams led clean water regulation compliance training workshops in 22 counties.

"That's how extension has to work. It's an emergency when a producer gets a $50,000 fine," Williams said.

During feedlot inspections Williams said he would make himself available to be a third-party observer.

Following the rash of EPA inspections, Williams said several feedlots went out of business while others were moved away from running water, but no more fines were assessed.

Williams was baptized with the fire of livestock regulations from his first arrival in July 1993. On his to-do list was implementing the Wallowa County Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Plan, a guide for land use near streams bearing endangered fish. The plan was written in response to regulations put in place following the endangered species listing of Snake River chinook in 1992. The listing threatened to curtail timber harvest and ranching by restricting industrial activity near fish-bearing streams.

Katy Nesbitt / For The Observer

An extension agent charged with working with Wallowa County's natural resource agencies John Williams tours the proposed Lostine River Corridor Safety Project in the summer of 2016.

Even today, Williams said, the salmon plan is regularly referenced when the Natural Resource Advisory Committee technical committee considers land use issues, but he argued there was more to the plan than protecting the ecology and livelihood of the county.

"The salmon plan really set the stage for positive relations between Wallowa County and the Nez Perce Tribe," Williams said. "The fact the salmon plan is being implemented by the NRAC 25 years later says a lot."

Salmon, water and land use commonly bring divergent needs to the table. One of the county's most difficult issues during the last 40 years was how to pay to rebuild the Wallowa Lake Dam. Williams recalled a meeting nearly 20 years ago when Silas Whitman, then head of Nez Perce Fisheries and co-drafter of the salmon plan, addressed a group of representatives from 44 entities gathered to discuss the dam.

"Silas asked us, 'Assume whatever you need will be protected and think about what you will bring to the table to make it happen,'" Williams said.

Following that meeting, the Wallowa Lake irrigators asked Williams to write a paper on the agricultural economic impact the lake provided. Wallowa Lake Irrigation District board members are still using that study today as they formulate a plan to rebuild the dam. Whitman's words ring in Williams' ears today when the NRAC works with diverse groups to solve problems.

"We believe our process is better than anything else we found because we engage the people who make the decisions and get to know them," Williams said. "Those relationships are what make a difference over time."

PETITION

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taking steps toward letting citizens vote on whether to repeal the ban.

In May, the council held the first formal reading of the measure.

At the June city council meeting, the second reading of the measure was held, and more opponents to repealing the ban attended the meeting.

After testimony by the repeal's opponents, the council voted 6-1 to leave the ordinance as is, with councilor Nicole Howard being the single vote against.

This led Moyal and Christopher Jennings to co-sponsor the petition effort to get the repeal on the ballot in November.

Approximately 18 volunteers circulated the petition. They also had petitions inside a few local businesses including Highway 30 Cannabis, Desires LLC and Eagle Cap Dispensary.

Moyal said he was happy with the results of the petition efforts, no matter the outcome.

"I am over the moon," Moyal said, noting the petition was a grassroots movement.

Even if the ballot initiative comes up short of 1,200 signatures, the effort isn't over.

"Whether we succeeded or not, it's a good thing," Moyal said. "And if we failed, we'll be back in two years."

Contact Max Denning at 541-963-3161 or mdenning@lagrandeobserver.com.

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