

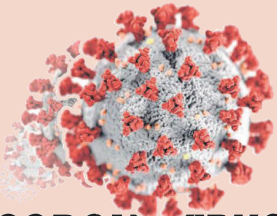
THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • March 21, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Michael Haefel of Union

Outbreak updates



CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Observer staff

These are the latest local significant developments of the coronavirus outbreak. Look for fuller coverage of these and other COVID-19 stories on our website, www.lagrandeobserver.com, and in subsequent issues of The Observer.

UNION COUNTY

The Union County Chamber of Commerce announced Friday it is indefinitely postponing the annual Chamber Awards Banquet.

The chamber reported the action was to abide by Gov. Kate Brown's executive order to limit the size of gatherings to more than 25 people "as well as do our part to help slow the spread of the recent coronavirus (COVID19)."

The chamber office is operational but not open to walk-in visitors. Staff is available only by phone (541-963-8588) and email (director@visitunion-county.org). Check the chamber's website (www.VisitUnionCounty.org) and social media for updates to follow.

Union County Public Works is open to the public by appointment only.

Grande Ronde Symphony Association canceled its spring 2020 rehearsals and events. This includes the April 11 and May 2 Chamber concerts and the May 27 Grande Ronde Symphony Orchestra concert.

Many banks closed offices but drive-throughs and ATMs remain open.

The Oregon State University has closed all of its Extension Service locations, including in La Grande, to the public to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. OSU Extension Service in a news release stated the closures will remain in effect until further notice. For questions or more information, contact the La Grande office at 541-963-1010.

The Oregon Department of Forestry effective

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Observer file photo

Union County has its first case of COVID-19. Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, and its clinics remain open for non-coronavirus medical issues but the staff are taking medical precautions. The hospital encouraged anyone who may feel ill with symptoms of the novel coronavirus to call their primary care provider for a preliminary screening before coming in.

COVID-19 IS HERE

Local health officials confirm coronavirus in Union County resident

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County has its first official case of COVID-19.

The Center for Human Development in La Grande confirmed Thursday afternoon a local resident has the new coronavirus. The non-profit center oversees public health in the county and in a written statement reported the exposure risk to Union County residents is low.

"This individual had a recent history of international travel and is not considered to have acquired it from community spread," the CHD statement said.

Outside of that, however, the center reported it is protecting the identity of the infected person and would not release any additional information about their location or who they may have come in contact with.

Carrie Brogoitti, the center's public health administrator, said the organization knows people are concerned about their risk and want specific information, but the local public health authorities can not share more information.

"I know in the past during other disease outbreaks public health has made announcements about locations where people could have been exposed," Brogoitti said, "but how we respond and investigate each disease is different based on how it is spread. In this case we focus on high-risk close contacts to a confirmed case."

NEXT STEPS

The center in a news release stated the Oregon Health Authority and Union County Public Health are working to identify and isolate any individuals who may have been in close contact with the person while they were contagious.

"Now that we have identified an individual with the COVID-19 virus, we will conduct a contact investigation," Brogoitti said. "That involves us speaking with the person who has the disease, identifying any people that they have come in close contact with that could be at risk, and notifying those people that they have been in contact and what they should be looking out for."

Anyone who was in close contact with the person can expect a visit from public health investigators, she said. But anyone else needs to continue following the daily precautions of frequent hand washing, social distancing and staying home.

The Oregon Health Authority's testing lab is the primary facility testing for the novel coronavirus, however private labs have begun testing as well. Brogoitti said the state agency works directly with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which confirms each case of the virus.

Brogoitti also said there is local testing for COVID-19 in the county, but that is only for those who meet certain criteria and don't have other respiratory infections or the flu. She said this is due to the limited number of testing kits available.

"We know that people want to be tested, and not being able to get an answer when they are concerned about their health can be really frus-

trating," Brogoitti said. "Because there is no specific treatment for this virus, in most cases having a test to confirm you have it won't change what happens and what the doctor tells you to do."

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend social distancing and proper hygiene as the most effective ways to keep the virus from spreading. Brogoitti said social distancing isn't possible for everyone, but the goal is to slow the spread so hospitals can handle an influx of ill people and to protect health care providers and other essential services, such as police and medics.

"Families can protect people in high-risk groups (people over 60 or those with underlying medical conditions) by limiting contact with them," she explained. "Use the phone, letters and video chat rather than in-person visits to keep them safe. Employers can look at telecommute options to help reduce the spread among their workforce and help reduce community transmission by allowing people to stay at home as much as possible."

VIRUS PUTS HOSPITAL WORKERS AT RISK

Grande Ronde Hospital is collecting specimens of people who meet the criteria for having the virus and sending those to labs for testing, hospital spokesperson Mardi Ford said.

Healthcare workers are another group at risk of catching the virus. Ford explained doctors, nurses and staff at the hospital are taking precautions to protect themselves in

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By the numbers

Worldwide cases: 209,839
Worldwide deaths: 8,778
United States cases: 15,219
United States deaths: 201
Oregon cases: 114
Oregon deaths: 3
Union County cases: 1
Union County deaths: 0
Wallowa County cases: 0
Wallowa County deaths: 0

*As of noon Friday, March 20

Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Health Authority
FAQ (from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

THERE IS A CASE IN MY COMMUNITY. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

During an outbreak, stay calm and put your preparedness plan to work. Follow the steps below:

•Stay home if you are sick. Keep away from people who are sick. Limit close contact with others as much as possible (no closer than 6 feet).

•Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation, including temporary school dismissals in your area.

•Continue practicing everyday preventive actions. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains 60% alcohol. Keep your hands away from your face. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily using a regular household detergent and water.

•Notify your workplace as soon as possible if your regular work schedule changes. Ask to work from home or take leave if you or someone in your household experiences COVID-19 symptoms, or if your child's school is

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Church services go digital amid outbreak

Congregations go smaller, services livestreaming

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Faced with state and federal mandates to reducing gathering sizes to curb the spread of coronavirus, many of the area's churches are finding different and creative ways to worship.

Churches in the Grande Ronde Valley are using measures ranging from livestreaming

— which many do already — to meeting in smaller groups on Sunday mornings as they tackle the challenge of providing worship and a sermon to parishioners with group limits capped at no larger than 25 and recommended at no more than 10.

And they are doing so with an understanding of the need of

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Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande Church of the Nazarene pastor Kevin Goss adjusts settings for the camera the church will use starting Sunday to livestream its services, which it is doing in response to government moves to reduce gathering sizes.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 30 LOW Mainly clear
Sunday 60/39 Partly sunny

CONTACT US

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Issue 35
2 sections, 12 pages
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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