CAUTION

Continued from Page 1A

chased that could have been touched by others, and the keypad and pen needed for completing the purchase. Then I grabbed my keys, my phone, the car door handle, my steering wheel, the shifter, the inside door handle, the front door to my house, and probably other things I don't remember before I was able to wash my hands. I sometimes try to imagine I have glitter on my hands and how many places I would leave it in one very short visit to the store."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and federal officials have discussed removing some protections and boost the struggling economy — and possibly doing so first in rural areas of the state

"From a public health perspective we do not want to do this too soon," Brogoitti said. "Our goal is to maintain health care and hospital capacity so everyone with a serious case of COVID-19 can get the care they need. The problem is that when we max out the system we are too late, we can't go back and change it once we get there. So what we do today is impacting what happens two weeks from now."

"This is the time to look out for each other, and check on our neighbors, even if from a safe distance."

Kip Roberson, library director

She said she can understand why some people consider social distancing and other protection measures as overreactions given Union County has not seen many cases — but retaining low numbers is the entire point of the ongoing restrictions.

"This is the goal, and we are meeting it," she said. "This is why we have all of the orders in place. One of the things we sometimes say in public health is that when we are doing our job you don't see us."

And viruses, she stressed, don't recognize geographic boundaries like county lines.

"Even with physical distancing and other executive orders in place, it is possible the virus can still spread here as it has other areas of our state and nation," she said.

For instance, neighboring Umatilla County has 29 cases total. So far, 16 of those victims have recovered.

The Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday reported 2,059 people in the state have tested positive for COVID-19, and 78 have died from it. But Wednesday marked the first day since March 29 that Oregon has not had any new deaths from the virus.

Still, until we know more about the virus, Brogoitti said, lifting the bans requires careful planning for mitigating the risks of infection, particularly among the health care workforce, first responders, police and people who are most at risk of becoming severely ill if they were to contract the virus.

"We know that the community is making huge sacrifices and that this impacts families and businesses in very serious ways," Brogoitti said. "I do remind myself every day that the steps we are taking are aimed at saving lives."

The local effort to curtail the spread of the virus received a boost Tuesday.

Oxarc Inc. of La Grande donated several items of personal protective equipment of gloves, N95 masks and safety glasses to Union County emergency responders, according to a press release from the local joint information center.

The NE Oregon Joint Information Center also reported Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics providers are concerned the pandemic is keeping people from seeking emergency treatment. For example, the La Grande hospital's emergency department is reporting the numbers for patients coming in with symptoms of stroke is on the decline.

Cook Memorial Library and other city departments are partnering to encourage residents to go outside each evening at 7 p.m. to wave and say hello to their neighbors. The goal of the "Say Hi La Grande!" campaign, according to the press release from the library, is to ease the loneliness of social distancing.

"This is the time to look out for each other, and check on our neighbors, even if from a safe distance," said library director Kip Roberson.

Other communities in Oregon and around the nation are participating in the neighborly wave movement.

The Union County Chamber of Commerce initiated a "6 Feet Challenge" on its Facebook page, asking businesses to find creative ways to show what 6 feet of social distancing looks like. Several have participated. You can check out responses at www.facebook.com/TravelUnionCounty/.

Efforts such as these are meant to boost morale as we wait out the restrictions of social distancing. Protection orders from the state and federal government are taking an emotional and economic toll, Brogoitti said, and it's important that moving forwarding should include assessing the greatest points of risk and putting steps in place to reduce those.

"We don't completely know what this looks like right now," she said, "but we are thinking about it and are starting to have conversations in preparations for these next steps."

———

Observer staff contributed to this report.

RACE

Continued from Page 1A

boost the economy by getting more of Union County's young people to stay here after graduating from high school.

"Our leading export is our kids who leave after graduating from high school," Barry said. "Many of them do not come back. We do not have opportunities for them."

He said he believes many would stay if there were a technology institute in Union County providing students with the training they need to develop skills to prepare them to work as welders, electricians, heavy equipment operators or in other trades. Barry said such an institute would make Union County more attractive to large companies considering moving here because it would provide them with a larger pool of skilled workers to draw from.

Barry said if he wins, he would strive to make sure Union County is always following a long-term strategic plan.

"This will help everyone row the boat in the same direction," he said.

Barry joined ODOT's La Grande office in 1990. He first worked as a geologist for ODOT and then as District 13 operations coordinator before taking his present position in 2011. Barry, who grew up in Lakeview in a sheep and cattle ranching family, has a bachelor of science degree in geology from Oregon State University and is a registered professional geologist. He has been a volunteer firefighter in Union County since 1990. He was a firefighter for the La Grande Rural Fire Department before joining the Imbler Rural Fire Department in 2006. Barry, an emergency medical technician, has headed the Imbler department since 2012.

"I have a strong resume and a lot of leadership experience," Barry said.

Beverage grew up in Union and has been involved in cattle ranching all of her life. She and her husband, Mark, have 70 head on a ranch just outside Union. Like Barry she has a wealth of community service experience. She has served as a volunteer for the Union Chamber of Commerce for 15 years and the Union County Chamber of Commerce for six years.

Beverage entered the race for her first term as county commissioner on the last day to file as a candidate. The incumbent, though, did not hesitate to file for reelection.

"I still have lot of projects I'm working on, and I need a second term to get them done," she said.

Beverage also discussed her work to develop a new business plan for Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union. The plan, which the Union County Board of Commissioners approved in 2019, will save the county about $60,000 a year. She also touted work to help scuttle the U.S. Forest Service's revisions for the Blue Mountain Forest Plan. The proposals would have closed forest roads and imposed more grazing and timber harvest restrictions. Beverage and others persuaded Forest Service officials to dismiss the revisions.

She said the Forest Service now is starting over to create a revised Blue Mountain Forest Plan that will include local input.

Beverage and Barry have similar feelings about the COVID-19 crisis.

Barry said when the state begins opening up the economy it will give special considerations to Eastern Oregon counties first. While the pandemic has not hit these counties as hard due to their lower population density, they have more fragile economies.

"They are not as resilient," Barry said. "They are more vulnerable."

Beverage said commissioners from 10 Eastern Oregon counties are providing input to the state regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

"We are at the table," Beverage said of the Eastern Oregon County Association.

She said commissioners want to make sure the state addresses Eastern Oregon's needs as restrictions ease.

"One size does not fit all," Beverage said.

Ballots for the election go out April 29. The victor likely will win a four-year term on the Union County Board of Commissioners, which would begin in early January.

However, should the winner not receive more than 50% of the vote, such as could happen if a write-in candidate entered the race, the top two finishers would go head-to-head in a runoff election in November.

TESTING

Continued from Page 1A

Some people with symptoms have nonetheless been turned away because they aren't part of the most at-risk groups.

It's unclear how the looser testing guidance unveiled Tuesday will increase testing across Oregon. The state in recent weeks has reported about 1,300 tests per day, on average, and Sidelinger said he didn't know how that might change.

"Over the next few days, we'll see if people are using these, what our testing numbers do," he said.

Until Tuesday, the state's guidance told health care providers in bold letters that people with mild symptoms or no symptoms are "not recommended for testing at this time."

While not exactly a ringing endorsement for testing, the state modified that to say: "It is recommended that people without symptoms and those with symptoms that do not necessitate medical evaluation call their provider to discuss symptoms and whether they need to be evaluated."

The state has also expanded the pool of people with symptoms of cough, fever and shortness of breath who are eligible for testing. The new groups include people of color and people who provide direct care, such as hospice workers, physical therapists, and also front-line workers.

OREGON'S NEW CORONAVIRUS TESTING GUIDELINES

Here's the state's latest guidance, which is dated April 20:
It is recommended that people without symptoms and those with symptoms that do not necessitate medical evaluation call their provider to discuss symptoms and whether they need to be evaluated. Individuals with mild symptoms that do not necessitate medical evaluation should remain at home until 72 hours after any fever or cough resolve. People with mild or moderate COVID19-like illness who seek testing risk exposing others in healthcare settings, including members of the public, other patients, and healthcare workers. For individuals with mild symptoms who present for care, testing is at the discretion of the provider. Evaluation and testing of such people in a healthcare setting consumes resources that may become extremely limited, including personal protective equipment (PPE), swabs and viral transport media used to collect diagnostic specimens, and ties up clinical resources, including healthcare staff and rooms.

Front-line workers include people who work in grocery stores, pharmacies, delivery, food service and transportation.

In another change, the state has now encouraged coronavirus tests for people without symptoms in limited circumstances: for residents, children, employees and others in care facilities such as nursing homes, schools, day cares, health care facilities, or in jails and prisons. Screening is conditioned on laboratories having enough capacity to process the tests.

The other notable change in testing is at the Oregon State Public Health Lab, which is run by the health authority.

The state now says it will analyze tests at its lab for people with symptoms at care facilities, and may consider testing people without symptoms. That's a big shift: state officials originally said they would use their lab to run tests for people in care facilities, then reversed course and said they would only provide minimal testing assistance because they were too busy.

Now the pendulum has swung back toward full testing by the state lab. The change is happening as state officials have few tests to process, with most hospitalized patients now having test results analyzed by in-house hospital labs.

It remains unclear what Oregon's overall testing capacity is. Sidelinger last week said he'd like to see the ability to conduct 15,000 tests statewide in a given week but told The Oregonian/OregonLive he didn't know the existing capacity.

Hours before, the deputy state epidemiologist, Dr. Thomas Jeanne, told doctors that Oregon's capacity stood at 1,900 tests a day — which would equal 13,300 over a week.

Philip Schmidt, a state spokesman, on Tuesday said Jeanne's comment were based on a survey and were only for the Portland-metro area, not the entire state.

"Overall, I'd say our testing capacity is currently doing quite well in state," Jeanne told doctors during a conference call. "We have the capacity for about 1,900 tests per day, including our state lab, all the hospital systems labs. That's not including the out of state testing through LabCorp and Quest."

Editor's Note: This article was originally published by The Oregonian/OregonLive, one of more than a dozen news organizations throughout the state sharing their coverage of the novel coronavirus outbreak to help inform Oregonians about this evolving heath issue.

SURVEY

Continued from Page 1A

for COVID-19. The Oregon Health Authority could not give the number of negative tests and overall tests "due to a technical issue with the test reporting database."

The DHM survey found little support for allowing businesses, schools and other places to reopen on a specific date — either June 1 or Jan. 1 — no matter what. Neither was there support for using a high unemployment rate (15%) as a barometer for reopening.

Fifty-one percent of respondents said Oregon is headed in the right direction, an 11 percentage point jump from last month's survey.

That sentiment varied little throughout Oregon, with 49% in the tri-county Portland area saying the state was heading the right way, compared with 52% both in the Willamette Valley and in the rest of the state.

"I think what this 'right direction' number is saying is Oregonians are hyper-focused on COVID, and they're giving the state high marks for how it's managing it," Horvick said.

But partisan differences showed, with Democrats (70%) more positive than Republicans (28%) and non-affiliated or other party voters (48%).

Worry about COVID-19 spreading locally was highest in the Portland metro area at 74%, compared with 68% among Willamette Valley residents and 66% in the rest of the state.

Slightly less than majorities agreed with monitoring COVID-19 patients with GPS to ensure they stayed in self-isolation, fining people who violated the stay at home orders or allowing people who have recovered from the virus to resume normal activities without restrictions.

DHM plans to release additional results on Thursday and Friday. The survey was conducted in partnership with the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

Follow us on Facebook!