

Most Oregon counties get the green light to start reopening

■ 31 of 36 counties can lift some COVID-19 limits

By Gary A. Warner
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday morning that most Oregon counties will be allowed to take the first step toward lifting emergency limits on activity put in place since March by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a phone-in press conference, Brown said she realized the decision to reopen some but not all counties would be seen as too little by residents who want to accelerate an economic rebound and too much by those concerned that it could lead to another spike in infections.

“But my job is to make hard decisions, even when they are unpopular,” Brown said. “When it comes to the health and safety of Oregonians, the buck stops here.”

By the end of the day, the partial reopening was approved for 31 of 36 counties. Those getting the green light included all counties east of the Cascades, all counties along the Oregon coast and counties in Southern Oregon. In the Willamette Valley, the populous counties of Lane, Linn and Benton were among those given permission to reopen.

While more than two-thirds of Oregon’s 36 counties qualified to reopen, about half of Oregon’s 4.2 million residents live in counties not covered by Thursday’s decisions.

The state’s three largest counties — Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas — did not file a request, saying they were not yet prepared to reopen. They represent nearly 1.8 million residents.

Marion and Polk counties, with a combined population of about 417,000, had their applications rejected because of concerns over high infection rates.

Among Oregon’s five largest counties, only Lane County at No. 5, which includes the city of Eugene, can reopen.

The patchwork of openings means some counties will see restaurants, salons, gyms and other establishments returning to business.

Brown said the moves were a clear-eyed attempt to balance the sometimes competing goals of public health and economic revival from a crisis that has put millions out of work.

“The shared goals of good public health and a strong economy are intimately connected,” she said. “It’s not an either/or scenario. As we reopen parts of our economy, we know and expect that there may be an uptick in new coronavirus cases.”

Brown said there will be no assured path to both ensuring public health and allowing the economy to recover in the foreseeable future. She likened the moves announced Thursday as the equivalent of stepping out on ice without truly knowing how thick or thin it might be underfoot.

“Reopening any part of our state comes with risk,”

Brown said. “This virus is still very dangerous. Until there is a reliable treatment or a vaccine, unfortunately, we will not be able to go back to life as we knew it.”

But the fact that large swaths of the most populous areas won’t see a change has Brown and state officials worried residents in those areas could travel to areas such as the Oregon coast, Deschutes County and cities such as Eugene, where they can enjoy relative freedom to eat, drink and socialize. That could expose the open counties to outside infection from counties that remain closed.

“We hope that people will stay close to home,” Brown said.

Oregon has recorded more than 3,500 positive cases and 137 deaths during

the coronavirus pandemic. The state has recorded among the lowest per capita infections and deaths in the nation.

About 1.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the United States, with almost 85,000 deaths through mid-day Friday. Worldwide, about 4.26 million have tested positive and 294,000 have died.

Oregon counties were invited last week to submit plans to have some of the restrictions under Brown’s March closure orders lifted.

They had to meet standards set by the Oregon Health Authority, including evidence the county could test for COVID-19 and had the staff available to trace the contacts of anyone with a positive result.

STATE BRIEFS

The Associated Press

Man gets 25 years for killing 3 teens in DUI crash

SALEM — A Salem man was sentenced Thursday to 25 years in prison for driving drunk, speeding through a red light and killing three teens in a crash.

Juan Rodriguez-Palacios, 26, was sentenced Thursday for the crash that killed Trinity Watt, 19, of Salem, Madison Capobianco, 19, of Salem, and Makayla Tryon, 18, of Keizer. The Statesman Journal reported.

Rodriguez-Palacios was convicted of three counts of first-degree manslaughter, DUI and two counts of third-degree assault following a bench trial before Marion County Judge Thomas Hart.

Hart found Rodriguez-Palacios guilty on all charges.

Watt was driving her friends Capobianco and Tryon for a quick snack run the night of June 2. She went into an intersection with the right-of-way when Rodriguez-Palacios, who was driving at about 85 mph, hit Watt’s vehicle.

His blood alcohol content was later tested to be 0.239% blood-alcohol content — almost three times the legal limit of 0.08.

The teens died at the scene.

wanted in connection with a murder in Ritzville, Washington, was arrested Thursday after he was hurt in a police pursuit and shootout with Oregon State Police troopers near Troutdale, Oregon.

Police were searching for Grayson D.W. Morris, 26, in connection to a Thursday homicide in Ritzville, KATU-TV reported.

Investigators said he was considered armed and dangerous.

Interstate 84 was closed at about 10 a.m. just east of Troutdale, where troopers used spike strips on the stolen vehicle the man was driving west on the interstate, according to the Adams County Sheriff’s Office. Morris then abandoned that vehicle and car-jacked another one, the sheriff’s office said.

An exchange of gunfire followed and Morris was injured, according to the sheriff’s office. He was taken to a hospital.

Authorities haven’t released any further information about the homicide.

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Boyfriend charged with murder for teen’s mom, brother deaths

ROSEBURG — The boyfriend of a Georgia teen charged with killing her mother and brother in a house fire was arrested in connection with their deaths.

The 17-year-old boyfriend was arrested Thursday after investigators in Georgia and Oregon found evidence connecting him to the deaths. The boy, who lives in Oregon, will have extradition hearings to face murder charges in Georgia, the sheriff’s office said.

Investigators said his girlfriend, Candance Walton, 16, set fire to the home near Forsyth, Georgia, on Feb. 27. Her brother, Gerald Walton, and mother, Tasha Vandiver, were found dead after the fire. Walton told officers she was on her way to Oregon after they pulled her over in Kentucky, while driving her mother’s 2007 Chevrolet Malibu.

Parents of baby who died from meningitis sue for \$6.3M

SALEM — The parents of an infant who died from meningitis after he was released from Silverton Medical Center are suing the hospital for \$6.3 million. The wrongful death lawsuit was filed Friday in the death of 7-month-old Blaize Wheeldon and accuses hospital staff of medical negligence and the negligent infliction of emotional distress.

It names a Silverton hospital emergency room doctor and Legacy Health, which operates the hospital, as defendants, The Statesman Journal reported.

Hospital officials said this week they were not aware of the lawsuit, but said it was Legacy Health’s practice not to comment on litigation.

Man suspected of murder in Washington arrested in Oregon

TROUTDALE — Authorities say a man



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HAPPY NATIONAL HOSPITAL WEEK!

MAY 10-16, 2020

The outpouring of support from the community we have the privilege to serve has been humbling and inspiring to all of us. Thank you.

Our staff continue to serve with compassion, dedication, teamwork, creativity, and courage during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, we want to give our staff an enthusiastic and wholehearted THANK YOU. We honor all of you, and look forward to celebrating with you.

TO LEAVE A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT OR SUPPORT FOR GRH STAFF, VISIT GRH.ORG/THANKYOU.



RE-ELECT BOYD RASMUSSEN for SHERIFF



Sheriff Rasmussen treats everyone with respect and is considerate of varying opinions. He balances that with being firm and taking charge when the situation warrants.

Join us in voting for Boyd so he can continue working in the best interests of Union County!
Dave and Zee Koza - La Grande



"In these uncertain times we need a home-grown man of integrity with steadfastness, strength, experience and judgement to see us through, Boyd Rasmussen is that man."
Dan & Nancy McDonald - Summerville



"Sheriff Rasmussen has worked hard for the citizens of Elgin to ensure they have the law enforcement they need. He has often gone above and beyond to serve all of us in Union County. Join me in re-electing him Sheriff"
Brock Eckstein - Elgin

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RESULTS MATTER!

- Created School Resource Deputy Program (La Grande, Island City, Union, Cove, North Powder)
- Restarted K9 Program (Molly)
- Instituted Deputy Field Training Program
- Increased Narcotics Enforcement
- Increased Volunteer Search and Rescue Funding
- Yearly Leadership Training for Deputies
- Updated all Deputy Equipment and Vehicles
- Enhanced Patrols in Elgin and Island City
- Improved Security Systems for Union County Jail

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