

TESTING

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search and rescue team. The clinic's aim was to test people investigators identified during contact tracing to be at risk for acquiring COVID-19.

The clinic Thursday conducted approximately 400 COVID-19 tests, according to the team's press release, with the capacity for an additional 400-500 tests Friday until supplies run out. Public Health Administrator Carrie Brogoitti said she has no expectations of what could come from the clinics, but obtaining more data will be helpful in understanding the situation.

"There is still prioritization on individuals who came into contact with people at the testing event last weekend," she said. "As we expand the scope of people tested it will give us more information about the spread in the community."

Close to 1,200 test results from the county have come back. The positive rate of tests had decreased slightly to about 21%.

Brogoitti said the two most likely outcomes of the testing

boost are either another large increase in cases or a steadying in the number of cases. The first scenario means the virus has spread throughout the community, she said, while a more gradual increase means the outbreak likely was confined to those connected with the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City.

The church is the source of at least 236 cases in the local outbreak, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Washington and Lincoln counties currently are the only counties with more COVID-19 cases than Union County. Lincoln County, which was the source of an outbreak at a seafood plant close to two weeks ago, Friday moved back ahead of Union County in total cases and now has 261. Union County still has the highest per-capita infection rate in the state at nearly 1%.

While the OHA pegged the church as the source, local public health officials have not been as direct. Brogoitti said the center continues to investigate the outbreak and the Oregon Health Authority has epidemiologists studying the data.

"We have been focused on managing the investigation and contact tracing and getting testing," Brogoitti said. "We haven't had a chance to look at that data the same way. OHA has the resources to determine that."

As such, she said, CHD "might default to OHA because they have a different lens on it." The drive-through clinic used swabs to collect samples for the polymerase chain reaction nasopharyngeal tests.

The test involves swabbing the throat or nose for traces of COVID-19. The test takes approximately two to three days to process and has a 20-30% false negative rate, due to the possibility the virus may not be present in the area swabbed in an infected person.

The OHA reported it does not consider any positives to be false.

The number of regional hospitalizations has not been available since OHA stated there were five tied to the Union County outbreak Tuesday. Since then, there have been 34 new statewide hospitalizations for COVID-19, including 13 more in Friday's data from OHA. How many — if any — of those are local has not been reported.

Wallowa County rises to 7 COVID-19 cases

EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County's number of positive COVID-19 cases rose to seven.

Wallowa Memorial Hospital confirmed on Friday the Oregon Health Authority will announce two new positive cases, bringing the county's case total to seven.

One is a person in their 40s and the other is in their teens, the hospital reported. The individuals are not hospitalized and are isolating while recovering. The hospital also reported the investigation is ongoing to identify potential contacts of the individuals.

The new cases will show up on the OHA's count on Saturday. Wallowa County had its fifth case Thursday.

The OHA in a press release reported that case involves a Wallowa County resident in their 30s. The individual also is not hospitalized and is isolating while recovering. That contact investigation also is underway.

Wallowa County's three new cases came in the wake of the major spike in COVID-19 in neighboring Union County, which as of Friday has 253 cases and only seven recovered.

ROUND-UP

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2017, the Round-Up reported nearly \$3 million in program service revenue, with more than half coming from ticket sales. But the Round-Up's overall revenue scheme is buoyed by \$2.2 million in royalties, which

mostly comes from the association's licensing deal with Pendleton Whisky.

The Round-Up has used its growing money streams to hire more year-round personnel and renovate facilities. New grandstands, concessions and dining areas gave way to outright expansion beyond the rodeo grounds.

CHURCHES

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place of worship, had been meeting strictly online since March and only in the last couple weeks started meeting again in person, though they were doing so outdoors.

Last week, the church resumed meeting online after Sheahan said he got a tip that an outbreak was coming. That likely will be the church's platform for the foreseeable future, he added.

La Grande Church of the Nazarene had reopened its doors when Union County moved into Phase 2, and pastor Kevin Goss said roughly one-half to two-thirds of the typical number of attendees showed up each of those two weeks.

Due to safety concerns, church leaders there, too, are backing off.

"With this recent outbreak, we've decided to put a pause on that and go back to primarily worshipping through our online means just to do our part for safety and protection for folks in our community," Goss said. "We really want to do our part to help slow this outbreak as best as we can. The concerns of the possibility being there is why we had guidelines in place from the governor's office and why we felt it best to abide by those. We're obviously very sad for the outbreak and those affected by that. Our hope is that it can be contained quickly."

Island City's Faith Center had not yet reopened its doors for worship but was close to moving into its own Phase 2 of reopening, which would have been to hold service at 25% capacity. Pastor Cameron Hefner said their plans are now on hold, and even the church's Phase 1, which was meeting in small groups, has been paused.

"We don't want to be driven by fear, but we also don't want to be too cavalier," he said. "That communicates something different."

Union Baptist Church was one that opened earlier than most, resuming in-person services in mid-May after lives-treaming for several weeks. Church services were limited to a maximum of 25 individuals in the sanctuary — which was within the state's Phase 1 guidelines — and there was an overflow room that pastor Nick Ham said was seldom used. Union Baptist led two services on Sundays, and when the county moved into Phase 2 increased the amount that could be in the sanctuary.

"People just want to interact," Ham said. "It is how we are designed. Coming back together has been a great relief for many people."

As for the plan forward, Ham said the church will move back to its Phase 1 operations, capping gatherings at 25 and encouraging congregants to social distance and wear masks.

Health officials pinned nearly every case in the Union County outbreak on the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, which, according to posts and videos it since deleted from its Facebook page, was holding services since early April that showed large groups not following social distancing and often engaging in the laying on of hands in prayer.

Rather than speak down to that church body or leadership, the pastors expressed their concern and heartbreak.

"My heart goes out to that church body," Hefner said. "We're praying for the leaders there as they make decisions. We understand what that can do. We know that if we had started meeting a month ago it

could have been us. That is devastating to think about."

Ham expressed a similar sentiment of it being a bad scenario but not being judgmental.

"I don't hold any animosity toward Lighthouse," he said. "They have been flying in the face of a lot of recommendations, (but) that's on them. I can only shepherd the people I'm here to shepherd."

It's uncertain whether Lighthouse's decision to gather despite social distancing regulations was related to what could be seen as inconsistencies in the lockdown. Wal-Mart, for example, didn't have to close, but other businesses and churches did.

The discussion on that within the Union Baptist Church congregation had some suggesting they meet in Wal-Mart.

"It's hard as a pastor, then, to combat that and say we need to be honoring (government) in that situation. I don't blame the churches that opened up early," he said. "I don't judge them."

Going against the state's regulations raises the question of the biblical concept of civil disobedience, of times when a believer or group of believers should obey God's principles instead of governing officials if asked to do something immoral.

Whether this was Lighthouse's reasoning is unknown. The church has not returned The Observer's numerous attempts to contact church leaders. Comments on the church's Facebook page critical of its actions or calling for a public apology have been deleted, as have The Observer's multiple requests for comments.

Sheahan, though, said he didn't believe the state's protocols met a standard that calls for not obeying government. Instances of civil disobedience he pointed to in scripture included when Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1 did not obey a command from Pharaoh to kill baby boys, and when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused a command to bow to a statue of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3.

He noted a command in Romans 13 to obey governing authorities "was written when Nero was burning Christians alive. We're a long ways from anything like that," he said. Rather than cases of massive civil disobedience, he said, "what we see in scripture is a quiet obedience to God first, not a civil unrest."

The reason also, Sheahan said, his church chose the path it did was that the "gospel of Jesus would compel us to think of others more than ourselves."

Hefner said he saw the Wal-Mart vs. church comparison differently because what happens in these settings is not the same.

"To meet in our church and worship (includes) standing in close proximity and singing," he said, adding that projecting when singing or talking makes one more likely to put droplets in the air that, if one is sick, could spread illness.

"What we do is different," he said. "We're going to approach it differently. I have no problem (with that)."

Goss added he never felt the church was being unnecessarily targeted and his church's approach was to proceed out of an abundance of caution.

"Because this was a health concern, we felt it important to listen to the guidance of the governor's office and the state officials, to the CDC, to Oregon Health Authority and to take (it) seriously," he said.

Hefner said he knows what the perception of the outbreak being caused by a church could mean for the multitude of the churches in the region.

"We know this could paint churches in general in a bad light. We want to make sure we are serving our community and position ourselves to love our neighbors as best as we can," he said.

Added Goss: "I hope

that we can all be judged by the merits of our own actions. I think the majority of churches here in La Grande have tried to handle this pandemic in a responsible and healthy way in support for our community, but I understand that people will see that differently and judge it for how they see it."

Sheahan's bigger concern is the situation potentially could hurt the witness of the church as a whole.

"There's definitely the hurt and frustration in the sense of establishing good rapport in the community and feeling that erode," he said, later adding, "This affects everyone. We gotta care for one another."

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