

ABUSE

Continued from Page 1A

in the school year, when children are around more people, including mandatory reporters such as teachers and day care staff. This year, however, due to COVID-19 putting children at home since March, it is possible there has been an increase in incidences of abuse but an underreporting of that abuse due to children being less visible.

The reality is victims who experience abuse at home may have been stuck with their abuser during quarantine, McDonald said.

She said the center is preparing for an uptick in reports when children return to classrooms and as social distancing restrictions are lifted.

“We hope that doesn’t happen, but it is a concerning trend that it might, especially with this isolation,” she said.

Morgan said the center is doing what it can to raise awareness of these issues through social media posts showcasing articles about abuse, ideas for crafts and ways to cope with stress.

Katie Greathouse, a counselor for Mt. Emily Safe Center, said caregiver stress can potentially increase the likelihood of abuse in the home.

“In my experience, if families feel like they have outlets, support and resources, it can reduce abuse in the home,” Greathouse said.

Mt. Emily Safe Center provides some of these services through counseling, respite services and encour-



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Mt. Emily Safe Center Executive Director Kim McDonald poses for a photo in front of the La Grande facility that helps children who have been victims of abuse. This year, the number of reports of child abuse are down, possibly due to the coronavirus outbreak.

aging families to find ways to relieve stress both inside and outside of the home, together and alone.

Greathouse said she has noticed an increase in abusive dynamics in addition to heightened stress, anxiety and depression in her clients through her sessions and conversations with them.

Isolation and quarantine may be causing these issues, at least in part, Greathouse speculated. The lack of clients during this stressful time worries her.

Mt. Emily Safe Center has seen a decrease in clientele over the last three

years, with a significant drop this year. Between Jan. 1 and June 30 in 2018 the center saw 65 children. In the same time in 2019 it saw 51 children, and in 2020 it saw 43 children.

“We’ve had a dramatic drop in calls to the hotline,” Greathouse said. “We don’t assume the abuse isn’t happening, though, but that people don’t feel like they have a place to tell, or it is just not being seen outside the home.”

She encouraged people who believe they may be witnessing abuse to call the center’s hotline at 855-503-7233.

DATA

Continued from Page 1A

mailed 100,000 invitations to randomly selected Oregonians to take part in a study to better understand the coronavirus. So far, 9,000 people have enrolled. Anyone 18 and older in the household that received an invitation may participate in the study.

“The project began when the pandemic started as a way to try to give people in the state as much information as possible,” lead researcher Jackie Shannon said. “We are trying to learn about how the virus spreads and how it is impacting communities across the state.”

OHSU sent 1,500 invitations to Union County residents. The 65 who volunteered to participate spend 10-15 minutes each day for 365 days sharing their health status through a survey.

“For a majority of participants, it is a simple login and temperature check on a daily basis,” Shannon said.

The study monitors a person’s daily temperature and any COVID-19 symptoms. If a person has symptoms, they may be sent a test kit at no cost, and those without symptoms also may receive a test kit at random. An Oregon Health & Science University medical professional contacts those who test positive to discuss results and care. None of the Union County participants have tested positive for the virus, according to Shannon.

Erik Robinson, senior communications specialist for OHSU, said those who participate are incentivized to do so by the knowledge they are helping people better understand the virus.

“Yes, if you have symptoms you can get a free test, and yes, you can get a thermometer, but those are



Photo contributed by Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Oregon Health & Science University Kevin Ystad collects Key to Oregon research study cards and packages them for mailing May 11 at Stevens Integrated Solutions in Portland. Oregon Health & Science University mailed 100,000 invitations to Oregonians to participate in the study about COVID-19. So far, 9,000 are involved, including 65 in Union County.

the little things that incentivize people,” Robinson said. “The big thing is the idea we can better understand this virus because you helped by participating. It is out of altruism.”

Researchers also are looking to gather data about how the virus is affecting a person beyond their health status. Participants can take weekly surveys on finances, attitudes about the virus and thoughts on topics such as schools reopening or face covering regulations.

The plan is for this study to be a model for the future in collecting data for marginalized communities, according to TerMeer. The study is collecting data on race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. TerMeer said by identifying those traits, researchers can monitor if the virus is having a stronger effect on certain communities.

“It is a study meant to reach a broad spectrum of the communities in the state,” he said. “We are looking to make sure communities who we believe to be more severely impacted have their voices heard. We want to have a safe and healthy community, but

the only way for that to be done is by including a broad spectrum of communities.”

The more that can be learned about how the virus is affecting each community, the more help can be provided for those communities to obtain access and break down barriers to the care and services they may need in their area, TerMeer said.

The federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act protects individual data. OHSU is sharing the results with the Oregon Health Authority and Portland State University School of Public Health. Shannon said data and preliminary results of the study are not available because it is too early in the process and not enough people are participating.

CASES

Continued from Page 1A

24 Wednesday to move to 1,462, while Baker County had two cases Tuesday and one Wednesday, and is at 16 total. Wallowa County stayed at 18 cases.

Union County still reports 46 recovered cases, though OHA is not actively contacting patients to check their recovery status. Deschutes County has the highest reported recovery rate in Oregon at 65% (253 out of 387 cases).

The statewide testing average ticked up to 4.16% Tuesday then briefly retreated to 4.14% Wednesday. There have been 14,586 positive tests out of the 351,987 total tests performed. More than 7,500 test results were processed between the Tuesday and Wednesday updates.

The positive rate still is less than half the national average, which as of Wednesday was 9.24% out of more than 50 million tests processed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Union County’s positive rate has dropped to 13.96%, with 352 positive results out of 2,522 total tests processed. The county has tested about 9.4% of its citizens, the 10th-highest rate in the state, according to OHA data.

Statewide hospitalization numbers have maintained roughly the same level. The OHA website Tuesday cited 19 new hospitalizations, and 27 more were reported Wednesday. The number of individuals in an Oregon hospital with either confirmed or presumptive cases is 231. The number with confirmed cases is 166.

Individual county hospitalization information have been vague, but according to the Oregon Health Authority, the number of hospitalizations in Union County has

FAST FACTS

- 385 known COVID-19 cases in Union County
- 15,393 known cases in Oregon
- County, state and nation positive rates: 13.96%, 4.14%, 9.24%
- State’s seven-day average of new cases is 339; daily count has been below the average three days in a row
- As of Sunday night, the La Grande/Island City ZIP code had a total of 324 COVID-19 cases; the Elgin ZIP code had 10; the average of Union County’s other five ZIP codes is 9.8

decreased over the prior two weeks. Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, has been listed as having “1-9” cases on the weekly OHA report each of the last five weeks.

Individuals 60 and older now make up 17.7% of all cases of the virus, a number that has continued to decrease in recent weeks. Those younger than 40 account for 52.5% of cases. The 20-29-year-old window ticked up to 21.5% of the total cases, accounting for over 600 more than the next demographic (30-39-year-olds). On its own, the 20-29 group accounts for nearly as many cases as those younger than 10 and 60 and older combined (3,311 vs. 3,339).

The overall mortality rate of known cases in Oregon has dropped to 1.76%. This is below half the national rate, which is at 3.65%, according to data from the CDC website.

Lane and Deschutes counties are among those that has passed Union County in terms of overall cases. Lane Wednesday was at 407, and Deschutes had 387. Overall, Union County has the ninth-most cases in Oregon, and is fourth in per-capita cases behind Umatilla, Morrow and Malheur counties.

Five Oregon counties have more than 1,000 cases, and an additional five have at least 300 cases. There are 16 counties that have less than 100 cases, and Wheeler County is the only one that has yet to report a case of the coronavirus.

CLINIC

Continued from Page 1A

2020. Completion is set for the fall of 2021.

It is unique because the facility will provide physical, mental and dental care for patients all under one roof. An integrated team of specialists that understands and treats the multiple causes of each health problem will provide care.

“We know, for example, that dental health plays a role in cardiac conditions,” Powers said in a previous conversation. “So it makes good sense to have dentists communicating with physicians when it comes to patient care.”

This full integration of care makes the Hearts for Health facility a pioneering concept in treatment, Powers said. So there’s great interest in ensuring its completion.

On Friday, July 17, Jett, Powers and owner’s representative liaison Lem McBurney led tours of the construction site for donors and others interested in the build-

ing’s progress. More than \$600,000 has been raised locally through gifts and Hearts for Health fundraisers for the \$7.4 million structure.

The tour began in the building’s lobby, which at the moment is an empty concrete pad roofed by the sky. The space, McBurney said, will include seating. But as patients enter the lobby, they’ll be greeted by the medical equivalent of a concierge.

“This will be a person who can greet whoever comes in quietly and privately, to determine what they are needing and help guide them in those directions. If it’s a busy time of the day, they’ll have two people working that concierge-type position,” he said. “The idea is to make your introduction to care more seamless, and less ‘Get in line, take a number,’ and make it more inviting and less stressful. There’s no gap in the kinds of services we’ll provide.”

McBurney guided the flock of donors and interested citizens into the roofless community room,

OHA on Tuesday announced it has set up an online test site locator to help individuals find where to get tested. It’s available at healthoregon.org/covid19testing.

OHA’s weekly reports also have begun to help show more specifically where the virus has been identified in Union County.

The July 15 and July 22 reports, which tracks data through the prior Sunday, listed 10 cases of COVID-19 in Elgin’s 97827 ZIP code, making it the second ZIP code in the county known to have at least 10 cases.

The La Grande and Island City ZIP code of 97850 had 324 cases through Sunday, when the county total was at 383. Cases in Elgin for weeks had been listed as “1-9,” which the OHA report uses for localities with single digits.

Union and Cove ZIP codes — 97883 and 97824, respectively — both have that ominous “1-9” listed next to them.

The ZIPs for Summer-ville, Imbler and North Powder are not listed, as their counts are combined with the rest of the state’s ZIP codes that have a population of less than 1,000.

If the other 49 cases were split evenly among the towns, each would have an average count of 9.8 cases. If the maximum that Union and Cove each could currently have — nine — is removed from the total, the average of the three smaller towns is 10.3, meaning at least one of the towns has 10 or more cases.

which was defined only by open, studded walls. It will include a resource center, a family room and a place where families can go outside into a protected, landscaped area.

The conference room will accommodate up to 100 people for conferences, meetings and could be rented for birthday parties and other social events. State-of-the-art electronics are part of the design.

The spacious kitchen is planned more as a teaching facility than as a place that will prepare food. It will include technology to provide online learning, McBurney said.

“The intended students,” McBurney said, “include folks who might need some nutritional coaching, or those who are getting used to a newly recommended diet or dietary changes. In addition, we’ll have a washing machine, a shower, and other facilities so that people who might not be living in a home can take advantage of them while they are here.”

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