

COUNTY

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the week of July 19-25 came back at a positive rate of 4.8%, a full point lower than the 5.8% reported the previous two weeks. The rate each week has been above 5% three weeks in a row.

People younger than 40 years old now make up

more than 53% of cases in Oregon (9,093) and the 20-29-year-old demographic has accounted for more cases (3,694) than those younger than 10 years old and 60 and older combined. The state’s overall mortality rate of known cases, even with a record number of nine deaths Friday, has dropped to 1.69%.

The national total also seems to be turning a

corner. It’s been almost two weeks since the U.S. had its highest daily count of more than 77,000 cases reported on July 16, according to Johns Hopkins University. Monday, Johns Hopkins reported 55,000 cases, the lowest total since 45,000 cases came in July 6.

As of Monday afternoon, the U.S. had more than 4.2 million reported cases of

COVID-19 and more than 146,500 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, putting the mortality rate of known cases at 3.47%. CDC has reported close to 53 million tests conducted and a positive rate of 9.53%. According to covidtracking.com, the seven-day average of tests in the nation has increased to roughly 800,000 tests per day.

HOPE

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are positive dropped over the last week to 4.8%, down from 5.8% the week before. Health officials have said they need the rate to be 5% or lower to keep the pandemic under control in Oregon.

The hopeful signs are a slowing in the rise of cases. A key measurement is the “r factor” — the number for how many people each infected person passes the virus on to. Today, the r factor in Oregon is 1.15.

Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen noted a New York Times survey that showed more than 70% of Oregon residents are complying with orders to wear masks in public spaces indoors and when unable to maintain 6 feet of social distance outdoors.

Allen said the state would continue to hammer the “3 Ws”: wash, wear a mask and watch your distance from others.

“It’s kind of a boring theme, but by dint of repetition, it is getting through,” Allen said. “We are seeing signs in the data that people are paying attention.”

Allen reiterated that any gatherings have a lower chance of spreading the virus if held outdoors instead of indoors. It’s a message Allen said will be repeated and repeated.

Oregon currently has enough hospital beds, intensive care unit beds and ventilators to handle the projected load of cases. While infections are on the rise, the largest group accounting for new cases are age 20-29, making up 22% of the total. They are less likely to suffer acute symptoms, need hospitalization or die.

Sidelinger said an

additional 10% drop in the infection rate would push the r factor under 1.0, which would mean a decline in new daily cases.

But any let-up in following the rules could lead to a 10% increase in infections that would show up in more hospitalizations and deaths.

“Cases would keep surging and we would rapidly run out of capacity to treat people who become seriously ill,” he said.

Gov. Kate Brown’s current COVID-19 state of emergency order runs through Sept. 4, the Friday before the start of the three-day Labor Day weekend. The Memorial Day and July 4 holidays showed spikes in cases immediately afterwards.

Sidelinger said the timing of any announcement is up to Brown, but that the current numbers pointed to an additional extension of the state of emergency.

Allen said the state expected to send out guidelines about possible K-12 school reopening procedures sometime next week.

As of Monday, there have been at least 4.25 million COVID-19 cases in the United States, with more than 147,000 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center. Worldwide, there have been over 16.3 million cases and 651,000 deaths, the center says.

The pandemic continues to set record numbers nationwide. California, Texas and Florida accounted for more than 500 deaths on Thursday.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House Coronavirus Task Force coordinator, said the three states were having a spike in cases unlike anything since the infection swept through New York this spring.

SCHOOLS: Mask rules present challenges to education

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The district was considering a four-period block schedule prior to the mandate and is reevaluating that option, according to Mendoza.

“We are facing tough decisions about how to best educate students while keeping everyone safe, and we will work with staff, students and families to come up with a solution that works for them and our community,” Mendoza said.

McKinley is confident the district will do what is best for students but said there likely still will be problems following the mandates.

“I think the teachers are going to do an incredible job to make sure the quality is still there,” McKinley said. “However, the regulations that will be put on them to socially distance will have an impact on their education. The teachers and admin are going to do everything they possibly can. When you put those restrictions (on) it will be an issue.”

Parents prefer students go to classes

Mendoza said most parents are willing to adjust to the requirements as long as it means their children are able to attend school.

“Most parents have indicated they prefer their children back in school physically, and some have indicated they would like online,” Mendoza said. “Most families are okay with increased PPE, increased sanitation and social distance to have their children in school.”

Nancy Arceo-Davila’s daughter Giselle Sanchez, 15, who will be a sophomore at La Grande High School in the fall, shared with her mother that while it isn’t ideal, she understands she has to wear a mask if she hopes to go back to school.

“She is spending time online looking at masks so she can coordinate them with her outfits,” Arceo-Davila said. “She wants to see her teachers and friends, and if wearing a mask is required to do that, she is OK with that. She is adjusting and I think that is the right attitude to have about all of this. We don’t know how long it is going to be around, so do the best you can to protect yourself.”

Imbler Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell said she wasn’t surprised by Brown’s recent changes. Imbler schools plan to start Aug. 24, and Lakey-Campbell said the district intends to follow state requirements while still finding a way to get students in classrooms.

“We have a plan. We are going to have to adjust it a little bit,” Lakey-Campbell said. “We are just figuring out if the schedule we had planned will work with the new mandates and limiting student-to-student exposure.”

Key elements of Imbler’s reopening plan include students attending

school on-site Monday through Thursday with half days on Fridays for students identified as needing additional support and online learning for all other students. Students will stay together in cohorts each day.

While elementary classes will be fairly traditional, sixth through 12th grade classes will be a mix of traditional classes and online classes. One of the biggest concerns, Lakey-Campbell said, is that following through with the mask mandate will take focus away from learning for younger students.

“Kids are kids, they’re going to be playing with masks,” Lakey-Campbell said. “Administering it, making sure they all have their masks and are on appropriately, it could take away from instruction.”

Some parents have reached out to the school to discuss the option of homeschooling. Lakey-Campbell said the district is working on putting online coursework together so that students can stay enrolled with the district while completing the work at home.

“We look at this as a community and we want to keep the community together as much as we can. If providing an online service helps (students) stay with us, we are going to try to do that,” Lakey-Campbell said.

Masks rule could be too strict

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit echoed Lakey-Campbell with concerns that the new mandates would be overly restrictive and take away from a quality education for students.

“Simultaneous compliance with face covering, social distancing and cohort mandates may be systemically overly redundant, and makes delivery

of a quality and meaningful educational experiences for our students all the more challenging,” Pettit said.

Cove plans to open Aug. 31. Faculty and staff at the district are revising the reopening plan for Cove, Pettit said. Classes will be on-site with the option to participate in Cove’s Virtual Learning Academy for those students who want to stay at home. There has been additional interest in this option since the governor announced the mask mandate for children, Pettit said.

Pettit also said it is primarily the Oregon Department of Education and decisions at the state level that will determine the fate of the school district’s reopening plans.

“The closer we get to opening the school, the more detail and level of control is directed by the state and less control for the people of our district,” Pettit said. “It seems to be the state’s universal reopening plan and ours only in name.”

Several parents in Elgin have expressed their desire to homeschool their children rather than require them to wear a mask at school. Michele Sandgren, who has a 9-year-old daughter attending school in Elgin, said she will likely homeschool her child.

“I just think it’s unrealistic to expect a young child to wear a mask all day, let alone keep 6 feet away from their friends,” Sandgren said. “I can’t imagine how teachers are going to be able to enforce that.”

Elgin’s superintendent, Dianne Greif, said to follow this mandate it is likely the school will need to hire more staff and spend more

money than initially budgeted. She said the mandate for children to wear a mask is not realistic and will cause more issues for

returning to school in the fall.

The Elgin School Board



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<http://openhouse.oregondot.org/i-84-meacham-kamela>

In 2021 and 2022 we'll replace the concrete pavement along the I-84 eastbound and westbound slow lanes between the Meacham and Kamela interchanges, exits 238 and 248. The project will also upgrade traffic signal in the Umatilla County area along state routes in or near the communities of Hermiston, Pendleton, Umatilla, Stanfield and Milton-Freewater.

- Will this project impact you?
- What suggestions or comments do you have?

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We greatly appreciate your input. Questions can be directed to Erin Winterton 541-963-1371, or by email at Erin.Winterton@odot.state.or.us.

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