

HOLIDAY

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The recent daily case counts don't meet the state's criteria for reopening schools to in-person learning. According to the plan laid out by OHA, the Oregon Department of Education and Gov. Kate Brown's office in July, counties with 30,000 people or more must have 30 or fewer cases per 100,000 residents for three consecutive weeks, and a test positivity rate of 5% or less during that same timeframe.

That same test positivity rate must be reflected statewide. The guidelines allow for some exceptions, in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities and students in third grade or younger, who rely more on in-person learning. State health officials previously said it's possible the state won't meet those guidelines until next spring. Fifteen counties, most of them rural, have lowered their rates of infection, kept their positive percentage rate low, and prioritized a return to in-person learning for younger students..

Sidelinger and Allen said right now, those who get infected in Oregon pass the virus along to one other person, on average. If everyone stays disciplined and follows the health guidelines for avoiding gatherings and wearing face coverings, that number could drop to 0.75, and Oregon could meet the metrics needed to bring kids back to school. **Oregon metrics for reopening schools** OHA directors said state health experts are looking to countries like Denmark,

Sweden and Germany when formulating Oregon's health metrics, and for cues on how to stop the spread of the virus and reopen schools. "The specific nations that we looked at really did take actions to drive their case rates down before schools reopened," Sidelinger said, such as face coverings and widespread testing. While some rural counties in Oregon have boasted low case counts over the past three weeks, the state's rules for in-person instruction rely on a combination of metrics, using both county and statewide health conditions.

COVID-19 by the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 24,299,923	Total Union County tests: 3,285 (11.63% positive)
Worldwide deaths: 827,730	Wallowa County cases: 22
U.S. cases: 5,845,876	Wallowa County active cases: 13
U.S. deaths: 180,165	Wallowa County deaths: 1
Total U.S. tests: 81,776,753 (8.70% positive)	Total Wallowa County tests: 837 (2.51% positive)
Oregon cases: 26,055	<i>*As of 1:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 28. Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Johns Hopkins University, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Military Department.</i>
Oregon active cases: 20,749	
Oregon deaths: 447	
Total Oregon tests: 542,589 (4.57% positive)	
Union County cases: 414	
Union County active cases: 367	
Union County deaths: 2	

CALF

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about 10 miles north of Harper, which is near Highway 20 about 22 miles west of Vale. Romans said he was home on Aug. 16 when he saw smoke billowing. He said he drove to the area that evening and by then the fire, the cause of which is still under investigation, had burned onto part of the allotment where his family's cattle were grazing. Romans said the cattle usually use that allotment from July 1 through Nov. 1. He said he wasn't overly concerned, in part because the cattle were in a pasture with lots of rocky areas, but not much heavy fuel to sustain a fast-moving fire that could threaten the animals. Romans said he and other family members spent much of the first half of that week, Aug. 17-19, helping to fight the fire to try to protect unburned parts of the allotment. Romans said he and other relatives were busy on Aug. 20 trying to protect private land that's part of the Becker Ranch. Finally on Aug. 21, he started tracking down his family's Charolais, knowing they would start dropping calves soon and that the



Photo contributed by Bureau of Land Management
Russell Hamilton, a fire operations trainee from Spokane, Washington, delivered a newborn Charolais calf to its owners from the Romans Ranch on Sunday, Aug. 23.

"We as ranchers in the Westfall Valley are thankful for our local BLM firefighters and the way they look out for our livelihood. Not everyone would have cared about that one calf."

Jeff Romans, Malheur County rancher

newborns would be less able to flee should the fire start spreading rapidly. That day he found about 40 cows congregated at a reservoir, with the fire burning all around them. Fortunately, the fuel was scanty, and a helicopter dropped a bucket of water on

the hottest spot to protect the cattle, Romans said. He drove the cows into a nearby canyon away from the fire, but with one exception. At that point only one cow had given birth, and the female calf wasn't old enough to go with the rest of the herd, Romans said.

The next day, Aug. 22, Romans said he returned to the canyon and found all the cows — including the one that had the calf. But the calf wasn't there. "Typically, when a cow leaves a calf she'll go back and grab it," Romans said. He notified fire officials



Photo contributed by Jeff Romans
The calf was reunited with its mother on Sunday, Aug. 23.

that the calf was missing. A day later, firefighters from the BLM's Snake River Valley crew No. 7, based in Vale, found the calf near the reservoir where the herd had gathered two days before. The firefighters coaxed the calf and brought her to Russell Hamilton, an incident fire operations trainee from Spokane, Washington, who is part of the multi-agency team that's managing the 48,000-acre Indian Creek fire. The blaze was 40% contained as of Wednesday morning, Aug. 26. Investigators concluded the fire was human-caused, but they have not identified a suspect. Hamilton hefted the calf into the front seat of his pickup truck and brought the animal back to the herd.

"We're very happy about that," Romans said. His father, Bill Romans, and daughter, Mollie, later found that the cow and calf had been reunited. Jeff Romans said he actually had met Hamilton a few days before, while helping to build a firebreak. Romans said the calf could be worth about \$1,000 next year and around \$1,800 as a bred heifer. Romans said he had a great appreciation for fire crews even before they rescued his family's calf. "We as ranchers in the Westfall Valley are thankful for our local BLM firefighters and the way they look out for our livelihood," he said. "Not everyone would have cared about that one calf."

WARMING

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course, also will have a big impact on shelter's capacity in the immediate future. "The number of guests we can have will increase when COVID-19 rules become less restrictive," Smith said. If the station receives permission to open in November, it will have been about 13 months after a vote by the La Grande City Council denied an appeal of an Oct. 8, 2019, La Grande Planning Commission decision that granted a conditional use permit for the warming station. The October planning commission decision had been appealed by La Grande developer Al Adelsberger, who said he was not against the warming station but feels its location is not ideal because it is close to downtown. The Third Street location is the warming station's third home. It was on Willow Street in 2018-19 and at the Zion Lutheran Church in the winter of 2017-18. Smith said there is a possibility the warming station will be able to open for day use before Nov. 15. If so, the organization will use that opportunity to train volunteers and as a site to help clients take steps to secure permanent housing.



Staff photo by Dick Mason
Union County Warming Station acting board chairwoman Audrey Smith checks one of the exterior lights Friday, Aug. 28, at the shelter's location in La Grande. The station hopes to open in mid-November.



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