



Students with the La Grande High School football team line up for training on Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2021. Gov. Kate Brown that day eased restrictions on outdoor contact sports.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Outdoor contact sports to resume

By SARA CLINE

Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday, Feb. 10, that some outdoor contact sports, including high school football, can resume this week.

In addition, the Oregon Health Authority reported data shows a “sharp decrease” in daily cases, hospitalizations and deaths from the previous week.

“This has been a difficult year for Oregon’s youth athletes and, as our COVID-19 numbers have dropped, I have been committed to working with our health experts to reevaluate our protocols for sports,” Brown said. “School sports play an important role in fostering students’ mental, emotional, and physical health. We will proceed with caution, to ensure that teams are following health and safety precautions to protect our athletes, their families, and their communities.”

Health and safety protocols for school sports teams are determined based on the counties risk level.

In “lower risk” and “moderate risk” counties, practices and games for outdoor contact sports can

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— Gov. Kate Brown

resume. In “high risk” and “extreme risk” counties, where COVID-19 remains more widespread, schools and other sports organizations can opt-in to resuming outdoor contact sports with additional protocols in place; On-site COVID-19 testing for symptomatic individuals, contact information for contact tracing and a waiver identifying health and safety risks and a commitment to isolation and quarantine if exposed to COVID-19.

In addition schools in “high risk” and “extreme risk” counties must also have at least limited in-person instruction occurring, “with the goal of achieving hybrid or full in-person instruction for students this school year,” the governor’s office said in a press release.

Schools and sports organizations in “high risk” and “extreme risk” counties that do not opt in and implement the protocols and requirements will continue to be limited to non-contact sports, practices and games.

Indoor contact sports are still banned.

“To all of Oregon’s high school athletes: I am asking you now to be leaders in your communities,” Brown said. “We’ve given you the chance to play, but with that opportunity comes great responsibility. If COVID-19 numbers spike, we may have to shut down contact sports again.”

Brown said that during the past year she has received many emails from athletes, coaches and parents, asking for sports to resume.

“I am challenging you now to devote your energy to making sure in-person academics can resume for your kids, too,” Brown said. “If our school gyms, fields, and weight rooms are to reopen, we owe it to Oregon’s children to make sure our classrooms, libraries, and science labs fully reopen as well.”

In addition, as COVID-19 cases in the state decrease, Brown said the Oregon Health Authority will review and

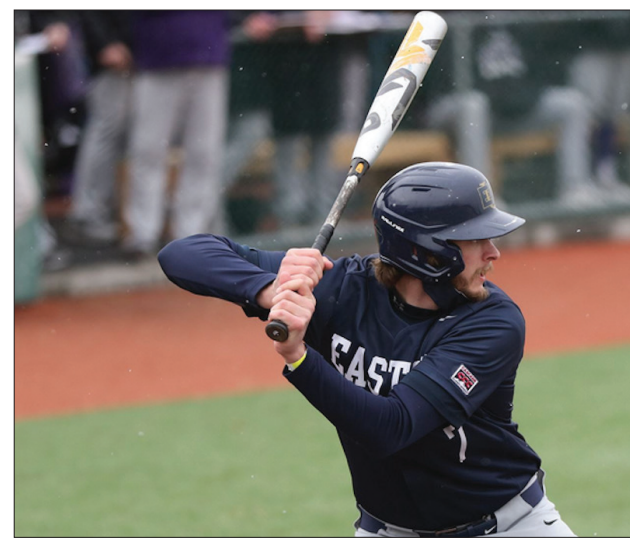
update the exemption for college sports—allowing Division 2, Division 3, and NAIA schools to submit health and safety plans to resume college athletics.

The health authority reported 555 new confirmed and presumptive COVID-19 cases Wednesday, bringing the state’s total since the start of the pandemic to 148,475. The death toll is 2,044.

Officials from the health authority said that the most recent weekly data shows cases have decreased.

During the week of Feb. 1, the health authority reported a 15% decrease of cases from the previous week and the lowest weekly total in three months.

New COVID-19 related hospitalizations similarly declined by 8% from the previous week. Virus-related deaths decreased to 66 — the lowest weekly total since mid-November.



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

Eastern Oregon University infielder Carsten Manderbach gets ready for a pitch in this undated photo. The EOU Mountaineers played their first baseball games in 14 years on Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, in Caldwell, Idaho, against the College of Idaho. The Yotes took both games in the doubleheader.

Mountaineers drop two in return to baseball action

The Observer

CALDWELL, Idaho — The Eastern Oregon University Baseball team ended its 14-year hiatus Thursday afternoon, Feb. 11, as it played a non-conference doubleheader against longtime rival College of Idaho.

The two teams played a pair of nine inning contests in Caldwell, Idaho, with the Yotes winning the first game 13-9 and the second 5-1.

The first match featured a total of 28 hits, according to the press release from EOU, with College of Idaho having the edge at 17-11. While the Yotes had five errors, the Mountaineers still fell.

Game two was a defensive battle for the first half of the contest, according to EOU, with just 13 total hits. The Yotes had the edge 8-5, but committed four errors to EOU’s one.

MOUNTAINEERS STAT LEADERS:

- Brooks Dyer and Easton Watterson both went 2-4 to lead the offense.
- Carsten Manderbach scored one run while hitting 1-4.
- Tristan Fergus had the lone RBI for Eastern.
- Jacob Farnsworth suffered the loss (0-1) in a relief effort. He worked three complete innings and fanned three batters.
- Nick Jennings pitched six strikeouts in three innings while allowing just two hits.

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Ontario seeks to boost tax on marijuana sales

By LILIANA FRANKEL

Malheur Enterprise

ONTARIO — A new lobbyist will be heading to Salem on behalf of the city of Ontario.

The Ontario City Council voted Thursday, Feb. 11, to allot \$20,000 toward promoting legislation that would increase the amount of tax the city collects on its marijuana sales.

Voting yes on the measure were Councilors Freddy Rodriguez, Sam Baker, Michael Braden, John Kirby and Ken Hart. Mayor Riley Hill wasn’t present, but he has been a vocal proponent of increasing taxes on marijuana.

Despite its small size and rural character, Malheur County, where dispensaries are concentrated in Ontario, consistently ranks third in marijuana sales statewide, just behind Portland-area counties.

Ontario saw \$9.5 million in sales in January alone. It assesses a 3% sales tax on that revenue and the state collects an additional 17%. The state then allocates 10% of its marijuana tax collection back to cities, but it does so based on a formula relating to a city’s population, not the amount of marijuana sold in a particular community.

Ontario, as a border city where dispensaries serve a large proportion of Idahoans, is at a disadvantage.

It attracts customers from across the Boise area, but its official population is small.

That means Ontario sends about \$1.7 million a year to Salem, but gets back only 3% of that.

House Bill 2014 would change the state formula so the share of money some cities receive would be based on sales of marijuana rather than their population. This would likely mean an increase of funds for Ontario. The money redistributed to Ontario by the state of Oregon, currently about \$55,000 a year, has to be spent on public safety.

The only uncertainty is Ballot Measure 110, which voter approved in November 2020 to decriminalize possession of most drugs in Oregon. The law capped state revenue from marijuana at \$11.25 million per quarter. All revenue in excess of that now goes to the Drug Treatment and Recovery Services Fund.

Ontario City Manager Adam Brown estimated with the cap in place, the amount of money available for redistribution to cities would be effectively reduced by 75%.

“In reality, what the government did was fund the police, because that money was for public safety,” Brown said.

House Bill 2015, meanwhile, would allow Ontario to raise the local tax from 3% to 10%.

According to Brown, legal marijuana is a relatively “inelastic” product, meaning that even if its price should rise, users will continue to buy at about the same rate. Brown said that as such, Ontario has plenty of room to raise taxes without worrying that those taxes will depress sales.

Ontario spends the \$3 million a year it collects through the 3% sales tax mostly on one-time costs such as buildings, parks, and other improvements, code enforcement, and retirement debt.

Brown estimated a 10% local tax would give the city about \$10 million a year.

The \$20,000 the city has moved to spend on a lobbyist will come from the city’s general fund.

“Lobbyists in Salem will know who the influencers are, the mavens,” said Brown, explaining why the investment is worthwhile.

Two years ago, Brown went to Salem with Mayor Riley Hill to advocate for a tax change, but they were unsuccessful.

Brown said that he would consider asking city officials in Portland to collaborate in funding the lobbyist, since the legislation would benefit them as well.

The councilors expressed their support for Brown in looking for partnerships to help fund the lobbyist.

“Having a partner would help out,” said Rodriguez.

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-Gerrie Gardner, FACC, FACP
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