

# MASKS

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would not be a distraction for those who chose not to wear them.

The Oregon Department of Education will announce next week details about the mandate and its rules.

“Hopefully, this will bring more clarity,” Wells said.

Wells and other educators want to know if the mandate will require students who have already been vaccinated for COVID-19 to wear masks at school. North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon believes the impact of such a rule within the mandate would be both good and bad.

“It would encourage students to get vaccinated,” he said.

On the other hand, students who have not been vaccinated might see many classmates not wearing masks and copy them, creating a situation that would be difficult to address.

“We would be fighting a battle we would not win,” Dixon said. “It could create a lot of chaos.”

The possible vaccination issue would not impact students ages 12 and younger since COVID-19 vaccinations are not yet available to them.

Dixon said he would like the state to give school districts more local control in terms of how they handle the pandemic. He said that when school districts were provided that opportunity in 2020-21, things worked out well.

He noted that of the limited number of North Powder students who contracted COVID-19 in the past school year, none contracted the virus on campus.

“There was not a case spread in school,” he said.

Imbler School District’s interim superintendent,

Doug Hislop, feels for the students who were homeschooled or took classes online last year because they didn’t want to wear masks on campus. He believes many of these same students who were planning to return to school for on-site learning at Imbler will not come back in the fall.

“It will mean another year of not seeing their classmates at school,” he said.

Wells said he hopes the mandate does not mean the upcoming school year will be comparable to 2020-21 when tight COVID-19 rules were in place through much of the year.

“We survived last year, but no one wants to go through that again,” he said.

Dixon believes that ultimately schools will find positive solutions to the challenges posed by COVID-19.

“I’m sure that at the end of the day we will do what is best for students,” he said.

Mulvihill said he understands how frustrated educators are becoming when dealing with COVID-19 and the never-ending challenges it poses, many of which they thought were in the rearview mirror.

“The virus plays by its own rules,” he said.



Mulvihill



Hislop



Wells

# SPIKE

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patients,” Ford said. “However, we would also like our community to take COVID-19 seriously and follow the CDC/OHA guidelines in order to prevent overwhelming hospital capacity.”

In Umatilla County, the county’s public health department has aligned with recent recommendations from the state and federal government that everybody, including fully vaccinated people, should wear masks indoors “due to a substantial increase in Umatilla County’s COVID-19 case rate.”

The Oregon Health Authority does not publish case rates over seven days in its weekly metrics, but a report on July 26 shows that, from July 11-22, Umatilla County saw a case rate of 504 new cases per 100,000 people — by far the highest in the state.

During that same period, 17.6% of all tests in the county came back positive, the second highest in Oregon, just behind Morrow County’s 17.9%.



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group, File

A spokesperson for Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, said on July 29, 2021, there are 11 bed occupants at the hospital. Information on the COVID-19 status was not available.

“At this point, you’re either going to get the virus or you’re going to get vaccinated,” Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said. He added that masks are a “tool that we can use to try to not overload the hospitals and — not to be too blunt — not end up with a whole bunch of dead people.”

Around the country, COVID-19 cases are rising and communities are reinstating restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. Los Angeles County, Wash-

ington, D.C., and St. Louis, Missouri, have all brought back mask mandates for all residents, vaccinated or not.

On July 27, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that all residents in high-risk areas — regardless of vaccination status — should wear masks.

On the same day, the Oregon Health Authority recommended people wear masks in indoor public spaces, but did not mention a possibility of a statewide mask mandate.

On Friday, July 30, Gov. Kate Brown released an order for state workers and public visitors to wear masks inside state facilities but did not update the current policy of leaving public health mandate decisions to individual counties.

“We also must protect everyone — both agency employees and community members who visit state agencies for information, services, and resources. This new guidance accomplishes both,” Brown said in a statement.

# FREE SPORTS PHYSICALS



FREE Sports Physicals are available to any student in grades 4-12 at the selected locations below. Visit [grh.org/sportsphysicals](http://grh.org/sportsphysicals) for a list of available dates by location.

## Women’s & Children’s Clinic

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## Union Clinic

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## GRANDE RONDE HOSPITAL AND CLINICS

Grande Ronde Hospital, Inc. is a private, 501(c)3 not-for-profit health system, established 1907.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Nicholas Fairbanks takes off down a wooden ramp on Mount Emily Recreation Area’s Dirt Circus mountain bike trail during the annual Blue Mountain Singletrack Trails Club Shuttle Day on Saturday, June 26, 2021. MERA has reopened access to nonmotorized vehicles following a temporary ban on their usage due to the increased fire risk.

# OPEN

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close MERA completely on July 21 also was proposed by Anderes, who helps oversee MERA in his position on the board.

He said his decisions to recommend the complete closure of MERA and then its partial reopening were very difficult.

“They have been the hardest I’ve made since becoming a commissioner,” said Anderes, who joined the Union County Board of Commissioners in 2019.

Emails read at the July 28 meeting said that the MERA closure was hurting tourism in La Grande because travelers who would normally visit MERA were traveling through the area and not stopping.

Other emails supported reopening the recreational area to motor vehicles. One stated that most wild-

fires are started by lightning and only a small percentage are ignited by motor vehicles.

Sean Chambers, Union County parks coordinator, said that since MERA was closed July 21, “people have been very respectful” of the temporary rules.

MERA is a few miles north of downtown La Grande and has a total of 3,700 acres, all forest land.

The recreation area has 45 miles of trails for nonmotorized activities such as mountain biking, hiking and horseback riding, and 45 miles of trails for motorized vehicles including all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles.

The partial reopening of the Mount Emily Recreation Area will be reviewed by the Union County Board of Commissioners when it meets Wednesday, Aug. 4. The meeting will start at 9 a.m. in the Joseph Building.

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GROWLERS

<u>Sunday, August 1st</u>	
4:00 pm to 6:00 pm-	Open Class Entries Due
<u>Monday, August 2nd</u>	
10:00 am to 7:00 pm-	Open Class Entries Due
3:00 pm-	Open Class Small Animal Show
<u>Tuesday, August 3rd</u>	
8:00 am to 10:00 am-	Horticulture Entries Only
8:00 am-	Open Class Judging Begins
<u>Wednesday, August 4th</u>	
8:00 am-	Fair Opens
10:00 am-	Exhibit Booths Open
1:00 pm-	Open Class Sheep & Meat Goat Show
5:00 pm-	Open Class Beef & Dairy Cattle Show
4:00 pm-	Brady Goss Large Stage
8:00 pm-	Brady Goss Large Stage
10:00 pm-	Fair Closes
<u>Thursday, August 5th</u>	
8:00 am-	Fair Opens
10:00 am-	Exhibit Booths Open
2:00 pm-	Denny Lankford Small Stage
5:00 pm-	Tammy the Hypnotist Large Stage
<u>Thursday, August 5th, cont.</u>	
6:00 pm-	Becki’s Studio of Dance
6:30 pm-	Mutton Busting & Stick Horse Race at Maverick Arena
8:00 pm-	Tammy the Hypnotist Large Stage
10:00 pm-	Fair Closes
<u>Friday, August 6th</u>	
8:00 am-	Fair Opens
9:00 am-	Open Class Dairy Goats
10:00 am-	Exhibit Booths Open
2:00 pm-	Glitter Funk Large Stage
3:00 pm-	Pee Wee Show
4:00 pm-	Fair Parade Line Up
6:00 pm-	Fair Parade Downtown
8:00 pm-	Too Slim & The Taildraggers Large Stage
10:00 pm-	Fair Closes
<u>Saturday, August 7th</u>	
8:00 am-	Fair Opens
10:00 am-	Exhibit Booths Open
4:00 pm-	Wasteland Kings Large Stage
8:00 pm-	Wasteland Kings Large Stage
10:00 pm-	Fair Closes