

COVID-19

Continued from Page A1

the county reported more than 500 cases in a week — a number health officials said at the time was surely an undercount.

Similar trends have been reported in Union County, where 124 cases were reported throughout November, a significant drop from August, when the county tallied 568 cases as the delta variant rocked Oregon’s health care system. Weekly average case counts have dropped into single digits for most of November. The weekly average of three cases, reported on Wednesday, Dec. 1, marked the lowest average in Union County since July 18.

“Information about the omicron variant is still emerging, so it is difficult to say how this will impact disease trends locally,” said Carrie Brogoitti, public health administrator at the Center for Human Development, La Grande. “We continue to recommend the prevention strategies we have been using all along to slow the spread of all COVID-19 variants — vaccination, masking, improving ventilation, distancing and hand washing.”

Lowered numbers have been a cause for optimism among county officials, but Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Robert Fox, a graduate student at Eastern Oregon University, prepares to receive a COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic in La Grande on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.

reminds residents to continue to be careful.

“We’re really happy the numbers are down,” she said. “No one really knows what will happen in the future, so we have to be cautious.”

Omicron wild card

However, as long as vaccination rates across the region remain among the lowest in Oregon, health officials voiced concern that infection could sweep through the region if the

omicron variant proves more transmissible or deadly.

“As long as there is a reservoir for infection to happen, it will happen,” said Dr. Jon Hitzman, Umatilla County’s public health officer. He added: “Despite our best efforts, we remain one or two steps behind this virus.”

The omicron variant, which was in Europe before it was first reported in South Africa, has caused considerable panic world-

wide. Last week, several countries immediately banned foreign travelers altogether as reports about the variant spread. Even the stock market took a brief but notable tumble in the wake of the news of the variant.

Three cases of the variant have so far been reported in the United States, and officials say that more will likely be reported in the coming days and weeks, the New York Times reported.

With the upcoming influx of travel around the holidays, President Joe Biden announced on Thursday, Dec. 2, that international travelers are required to take a COVID-19 test within 24 hours of their departure for the United States. The mandate for masks on public transport was also extended to March 18.

The variant’s arrival also prompted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday, Nov. 29, to change its messaging on booster shots, saying that people ages 18 and older “should” get a booster when they can.

Scientists expect to know more about the variant in the coming weeks. There is no reason to believe omicron is able to completely evade the vaccine’s protection, but it’s possible that the vaccine could be less protective.

Hitzman and Fiumara said it is best that residents practice patience as officials act quickly to learn more.

“It’s way too early to even begin to project how dangerous this is,” Hitzman said.

Holiday gatherings

Hitzman would not go as far as to discourage residents from gathering during the holidays, resigning to the fact that people will do what they want regardless of what

he says. He said he will be gathering with his family — who are vaccinated — for the holidays, but added that they will not be having their annual Christmas party.

“Individual freedoms don’t remove our responsibility for taking care of our neighbors,” Hitzman said.

Beverage reflected a similar sentiment, noting that holiday travel caution should be a decision every individual considers carefully.

“We want to be cautious, but I would say that’s an individual decision,” she said. “If someone feels at risk meeting at a large family gathering, they should be cautious and make their own decision.”

Brogoitti emphasized that prevention strategies can go a long way during holiday travel — handwashing, wearing masks and distancing.

“We would also recommend that people who have not gotten their booster yet consider doing so now so they have this extra protection,” Brogoitti said.

Hitzman and other Eastern Oregon health officials are pushing for the same precautions they have for months: mask up while indoors, stay home when ill, and get vaccinated.

“This is a beatable virus, but it’s going to take everyone,” Hitzman said, adding, “Right now, it’s all hope.”

STORMS

Continued from Page A1

their first runs when the weather allows.

“We’re definitely expecting pretty big numbers as soon as we’re able to open,” she said. “We’re all excited to ski.”

Judy pointed out that attendance was up at ski areas across the nation last winter, a trend industry officials attributed in part to people looking for outdoor activities during the pandemic.

On the viral front, Judy said this winter should be different from the last at Anthony Lakes.

Barring any new state-imposed restrictions, the plan is to open the lodge as usual this winter and have a normal parking

system, she said.

Last winter, by contrast, Anthony Lakes encouraged visitors to use their vehicles as a staging spot, and although restrooms were available, the lodge was otherwise closed.

Although face masks will be required indoors, they will not be mandated in lift lines, as was the case last winter, Judy said.

One change from last winter that will carry over to 2021-22 is on the Nordic side.

Judy said the mobile Nordic “outpost” — a converted trailer — will again be parked in the Elkhorn Crest trailhead lot about a quarter-mile east of the lodge, just off the highway. The outpost will have Nordic trail passes and hot drinks, among other services.

The Anthony Lake Guard Station, which formerly served as the Nordic center, is now available for overnight rentals during the winter, an option that was popular last year, Judy said.

The trailhead parking lot has more space for vehicles than the site near the guard station, she said.

New options for beginners

The gentle slope near the lodge where fledgling skiers and boarders hone their technique has a new look.

And a new name — Alice’s Wonderland.

The ski area has replaced the “carpet,” which conveyed skiers up the hill, with a covered conveyor nicknamed the Caterpillar (hence the ref-

erence to Lewis Carroll’s beloved fantasy tale).

Judy said visitors whose skills surpass the challenge of Alice’s Wonderland can move on to the Mad Hatter Handle Tow, previously known as just the handle tow. The Mad Hatter also accesses the Rabbit Hole terrain park for beginning skiers and riders.

Future characters, in the same theme, are in the works.

Alice’s Wonderland, as distinct from “Alice in Wonderland,” honors Alice Trindle, a Baker

County native and life-long Anthony Lakes skier, longtime ski school instructor and member of the board of directors for Anthony Lakes Outdoor Recreation Association.

Trindle recently stepped down from her board role but she remains an integral member of the ski school, where she started teaching in 1978.

Supporting locally owned businesses

In place of Anthony Lakes’ previous half-price Thursday lift ticket promotion, the resort is

offering \$25 lift tickets on Thursdays — the usual price is \$45 — for visitors who bring a receipt showing they had spent at least \$40 in the previous week at a locally owned restaurant or shop in Baker, Union, Grant or Wallowa counties.

“We’re encouraging people to get out and shop locally,” Judy said.

She encourages snow enthusiasts to check the resort’s website, www.anthonylakes.com, for the latest snow conditions, schedules and other updates.

DINING

Continued from Page A1

Connection of Northeast Oregon.

Norma Ringer, a Union County Senior Center volunteer, is also delighted about the move and impressed with the pent-up demand for the reopening.

“I can’t believe the number of people who keep asking me about when it is going to open again,” she said.

COVID-19 shut down the senior center’s social setting dining program but not its kitchen, which has been busier than ever during the pandemic. The kitchen’s staff continues to prepare an average of at least 100 lunches and dinners a day for its Meals on Wheels program, which delivers to the homebound. The kitchen’s staff also prepares as many as 70 meals each weekday for its grab-and-go lunch program that was started to

fill the void created when in-person dining had to be shut down.

The grab-and-go program will continue on after the traditional in-house dining program starts back up, Gleeson said. Beginning Dec. 15, people will be able to pick up takeout meals at the kitchen door at the back of the senior center at a slightly later time, from noon to 1 p.m.

The grab-and-go program is less than two years old, but the social setting dining program has been running for at least four decades. Its past and future will be celebrated on Dec. 15 when meals are again served in the traditional dining area for the first time in months. Meals on opening day will be offered free to all. The celebration will be conducted in conjunction with the serving of the meal, starting at 11:30 a.m.

COVID-19 safety rules will be in place during the serving of all meals,

meaning diners will be checked to make sure they are not sick, they will have to wear masks when they are not eating and they will have to sit at least 3 feet apart from one another.

Reopening the dining area for lunch is important because it will make it easier for seniors to enjoy nutritious meals, according to Audrey Smith, Union County manager of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon. Smith also said the opening will provide an avenue to protect seniors from isolation, an increasing concern during the pandemic because it has limited the number of opportunities seniors have to get out.

“A lot of them don’t get to see their friends,” she said. “They get pretty discouraged.”

Smith said the social setting meal program will address this issue.

“We want this to be a nutritional and a social center,” she said.

COVID-19 Vaccine

Drive Through Event Information:

Event date: 12/5-12/10

Event times: 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Event Location: 3604 N 2nd Street at the La Grande Fair Grounds

Mt. Emily/4-H Building

Vaccines offered: 1st dose, 2nd dose, 3rd doses and booster vaccines. All Covid vaccine configurations will be available including pediatric vaccination.

Registration: Will be completed at vaccine site

North Powder Vaccine Event:

Event date: 12/8

Event time: 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Event location: 333 G Street, North Powder Charter School, North Powder, Oregon 97867

Vaccines offered: 1st dose, 2nd dose, 3rd doses and booster vaccines. All Covid vaccine configurations will be available including pediatric vaccination.

Registration: Will be completed at vaccine site

Other vaccine events offered in December:

Location: Center for Human Development

Time: 10:00 am to 2:00 pm every Friday with the exception of New Year’s Eve in addition to Christmas Eve.

Additional options: Scheduled appointments available throughout the week.

Vaccines offered: 1st dose, 2nd dose, 3rd doses and booster vaccines. All Covid vaccine configurations will be available including pediatric vaccination. Other pediatric and adult immunizations also available at CHD.

CDC General Vaccine Info:

COVID-19 vaccines are effective

COVID-19 vaccines are effective and can reduce the risk of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Learn more about the different COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines also help children and adults from getting seriously ill even if they do get COVID-19.

While COVID-19 tends to be milder in children than adults, it can make children very sick, require hospitalization, and some children have even died. Children with underlying medical conditions are more at risk for severe illness compared to children without underlying medical conditions.

Getting children ages 5 years and older vaccinated can help protect them from serious short- and long-term complications. Getting everyone ages 5 years and older vaccinated can protect families and communities, including friends and family who are not eligible for vaccination and people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Booster Information from CDC:

Fast Facts Everyone age 18 and older is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine booster beginning Nov. 20, 2021. Some people are strongly advised get a booster dose to protect themselves and others. You can choose which vaccine to get. The COVID-19 vaccines are extraordinarily effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization and death. That said, we are seeing immunity drop over time, especially in people over age 50 and those with compromised immune systems who are more likely to experience severe disease, hospitalization and death. For these people, another dose boosts their immunity, sometimes greater than what was achieved after the primary, two-dose series. Health experts strongly recommend people over age 50, people over 18 who live in long-term care facilities, and anyone who received one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine get a booster dose. Younger, healthy people may also get a booster dose to protect themselves and others. A booster will re-build neutralizing antibodies that strengthen the body’s ability to fight getting a breakthrough case. Even if you’re not at high risk, you could be infected and then pass it on to others, such as children too young to be vaccinated, the elderly, or people who are immunocompromised. Booster doses help people maintain strong immunity to disease longer. The first vaccine series built up the immune system to make the antibodies needed to fight the disease. Over time, the immune response weakens. A booster dose stimulates the initial response and tends to result in higher antibody levels that help people maintain their immunity longer. Boosters take about two weeks to bring up the immune response. This continues to be studied, but we can reliably say it takes two weeks to bring the immune response up to or better than that after the primary series.

mowers | small engines | chainsaws | garden tillers | trimmers | trailers | utvs

Meeting YOUR OUTDOOR POWER NEEDS

CALL NOW!
to schedule service for the
Winter Specials
starting in
November
Up to **33% OFF**

INLAND

Turf & Equipment

541.963.4985

10303 W. 1st St. La Grande, OR

WWW.INLANDTURF.NET