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"It's important to honor them and their families."

— La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

La Grande Police Lt. Jason Hays speaks during a Union County law enforcement memorial ceremony on Friday, May 13, 2022. The La Grande event honored the lives of the county's four fallen officers in conjunction with National Law Enforcement Week, May 15-21.

Masks in school again?

State health advisory recommends mask mandates return to schools where COVID-19 rates are high

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Oregon's COVID-19 case rate is rising again and this has state health and education officials worried.

The state issued a health advisory Friday, May 13, effective through Aug. 31 recommending that schools require face masks again in counties where the federally defined risk level is high. No Oregon counties have reached this level yet but six are classified as medium. These six, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting, are Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Columbia, Benton and Deschutes counties.

The other 30 counties in the state, including Union and Wallowa counties, are listed as low, according to federal ratings, which is based on hospitalization data.

The state's warning comes amid rising coronavirus cases, a previously predicted bump brought on by the highly infectious omicron BA.2 subvariant and the lifting of mask restrictions. Hospitalizations are rising, too, and are predicted to peak around 320 within about a month.

According to OHA data, pediatric COVID-19 cases have been increasing since the middle of March, similar to cases statewide. Hospitalizations remain low but are on the rise. Health officials have called it "a mild virus" in most cases.

The advisory also recommends that schools monitor for high absentee rates and notify their local public health authority if absences reach a certain level, or if they see an "unusual spread of disease."

ODE said schools leaders should tell their county health officials if absences exceed certain benchmarks, such as if absences reach 30% or more, with at least 10 students or staff absent at the school level, and if classroom absences reach 20% or more, with at least three students or staff absent.

Should Union County reach the federally defined high level it appears that school districts would fall back on the protocols they had in place before March 12 when the state lifted the requirement that students wear masks in schools.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said his district would continue to make decisions based upon its Communicable Disease Plan. The plan calls for specific protocols

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LASTING LEGACY

Ceremony honors fallen law enforcement officers in Union County

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Four past fallen Union County law enforcement officers were honored last week in La Grande.

Law enforcement officers from the La Grande Police Department, Union County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police hosted a Union County law enforcement memorial ceremony on Friday, May 13, honoring four law enforcement officers who lost their lives in Union County. The event took place in front of a crowd at the Union County law enforcement building, with officials from the city and county in attendance.

"It's important to honor them and their families," La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell said. "Several of those individuals still have family members here locally."

Speakers at the memorial service in addition to Bell were pastor Franklin Humber, La Grande Police Lt. Jason



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

La Grande Police Officer Cody Kirby, right, lays a wreath over a memorial to Union County's fallen officers on Friday, May 13, 2022, outside the Union County law enforcement building, La Grande.

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Morgan recovering after 'three consecutive miracles'

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A string of miracles is what Sam Morgan of Enterprise believes has him where he is today, less than four months after a fall into Trout Creek that resulted in several broken vertebrae and ribs and had him on the verge of hypothermia.

Today, he can walk. While he has rods in his back that help support him and can be uncomfortable, he doesn't say he is in pain.

"In my mind, it's a miracle that I'm alive and not paralyzed.

I had, in essence, three consecutive miracles that day," he said, reflecting back on Jan 12.

The fall happened just two days after his 75th birthday. He had a plan to call one of his siblings who was celebrating a milestone of his own.

"I was supposed to call my brother and wish him happy birthday the day I fell off the bridge," he said. "His birthday is two days after mine."

Morgan went out that morning, he said, to pull a limb that had fallen from a willow tree into Trout Creek. He said the

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Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Sam Morgan poses for a photo next to Trout Creek behind his Enterprise home on Wednesday, May 4, 2022. Morgan fell into the creek from the footbridge in the background in January. He recalled how he felt someone lift him up so he could get out of the creek. He said that was the first of three miracles he experienced that day.



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	Tonight 45 Low Becoming cloudy		Wednesday 63/38 Rain and drizzle
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CONTACT US

541-963-3161
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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page A4.