

COVID cases rise, officials hold briefing

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IVN copy editor

On Wednesday, June 24, the United States reported 38,115 new COVID-19 cases, the biggest single-day increase since the pandemic began. This record was broken the very next day with 39,327 recorded infections.

COVID-19 cases are spiking throughout the country, leading many states to roll back reopening guidelines in response, including hotspots like Texas and Florida. Oregon Governor Kate Brown asserted that if cases climb as they have been, she could close restaurants and bars again, or even reinstitute stay at home orders.

"The increase in cases is alarming," Brown said on a press call. "If we continue on this path, we will need to start buttoning down the economy. I don't want to do that. It's not my preferred approach."

The governor's statement comes in the wake of new disease models released by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) that find Oregon may see COVID-19 case numbers of up to 5,000 per day by mid-July. Currently the daily average in Oregon is 180 new cases each day, so this would be more than a 20-fold increase. "The results suggest that transmission has increased since reopening," the report's authors stated.

As all of this harrowing data pours in, health officials from Josephine and Jackson counties held a joint press conference via Zoom Monday, June 29. Josephine County Public Health Director Michael Weber stated at the

beginning of the conference, "We decided to hold this press conference today because we wanted to address a number of issues that have arisen due to a spike in cases both counties have seen over the past week."

Weber stated that Josephine has recently recorded 11 new cases - six of which were logged Monday, June 29 - bringing the county's total reported cases up to 37, while Jackson recorded 18 new cases, bringing the total to 109. He added that of these 29 cases, 17 were attributed to inter-county travel and failure to socially distance. Many were contact traced to just two private parties. Out-of-state visitors were also purportedly responsible for spreading the virus to local communities.

"We're asking people to avoid unnecessary travel," said Dr. Jim Shames, Jackson County's health officer.

With community spread on the rise, health officials are concerned about the impact the Fourth of July holiday will have on virus transmission. After all, Memorial Day is being attributed to a great deal of the record-breaking case numbers seen nationwide. Weber and his colleagues ask citizens to celebrate Independence Day practicing etiquette that has been stressed throughout the COVID-19 ordeal, namely - wash hands with soap and warm water frequently for at least 20 second intervals; wear a mask and keep six feet apart from others, particularly those that do not live in your household; and an added recommendation for party or gathering hosts is to keep a list of guests so that if an infection is tied to the gathering, contact tracing can be carried out more swiftly and easily.

"We know that with the Fourth of July coming up... people are going to be gathering. What we're asking is that if you do, please do so safely," Weber advised.

"This is an opportunity to talk about how to do a party correctly," Dr. Shames added. "You want to know who's coming and where they're coming from. I think people should bring their own food and drink so they don't have to congregate around the drink station for example. Have it set up so that people can be socially distant. Everyone should be wearing a mask."

To Dr. Shames' last point, that's one COVID-19 preventative measure you're bound to be encountering more often in the near future; Governor Brown just days ago passed an order making it mandatory to wear one in all indoor public spaces. Josephine County health officer Dr. David Candelaria gave Brown's order his full endorsement, saying, "I think the idea absolutely has merit. Typically complaints we're getting at the health department from citizens is that people aren't wearing masks... I see the importance of masks rising in the face of this pandemic which is truly astounding in its reach. I am hopeful that there is enough ability of our citizenry to adopt healthful behavior and not stay entrenched in old behavior."

Candelaria added that even with the mask order in place, health officials are anticipating another surge in cases attributed to Fourth of July celebrations. "I'm expecting even more cases," he said. "I'm hoping that the number of increased cases isn't overwhelming."

Cave Junction City Councilor Tina Casey Jones wrote in a question for the health officials,

asking if local personal protective equipment (PPE) is in adequate supply. Dr. Shames said that at the moment there is enough PPE to go around for medical personnel, but some local operations, such as dentists, are seeing shortages. "One moment you have enough and then the next moment you find there's a pinch point and you don't," he commented.

Dan Mancuso, owner of the Illinois Valley News, asked how long an asymptomatic person infected with the virus can be a carrier. Dr. Candelaria replied briefly, "For as long as they have the virus." Weber elaborated by pointing out that COVID-19 is a new virus and is still being studied. "It's amazing to watch how quickly we've been able to gather really good, tangible information about how this disease spreads, about the disease state itself, transmissibility, about reproductive rates; all these things are things that we managed to gather. As a field of study we've been able to gather it over just the last few months. And we know so much more than we did a week ago... But that said, there's still things that we are learning."

The consensus among the health officials was that as the pandemic goes on, coordination between Josephine and Jackson counties will increase. So too should cooperation among citizens, for prevention of coronavirus spread begins with the actions of individuals. It is imperative at this time when the pandemic appears to be worsening to follow the advice and guidance of health experts.

Stay safe, and celebrate the Fourth of July responsibly.



On June 25 volunteer John Gardiner (left), Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG) Operations Manager Berta Varble and volunteer Lee Stewart (right) hand out 95 food boxes with a household member of 60-years-old and above at the I.V. Family Coalition to families. This event was sponsored by RVCOG and Senior and Disability Services.



(Photos by Laura Mancuso for the Illinois Valley News)

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In 2009, my wife Marcia and I moved to Cave Junction. The following is an example of my leadership with the I.V. Senior Center.

- Volunteer for the Senior Center Thrift Store since 2016
- Attended monthly Board meetings at the Senior Center for the last 3 ½ years
- Served on the by-laws committee for the last 3 years
- SOP committee for the last 2 years
- Election committee for the last 3 elections
- Coordinated the new safety features for the main entrance way into the Senior Center parking lot
- Coordinated the painting of the the inside and outside of the Senior Center and the cargo containers
- Obtained a grant from the Energy Trust of Oregon and personally replaced all the florescent lights with cost saving LED lights for the entire inside of the Senior Center
- Coordinated the reroofing of the Senior Center Thrift Store; and
- In January of this year, I was appointed to the position of Director at Large

I believe that we should make the Senior Center more inviting to our members. I would get feedback as to what the needs are from our members and institute ways to implement new ideas. Some of my ideas include: Have a user-friendly suggestion box; upgrade and replace old furnishings provide computers with safeguards for members use in the common area or the library; and have computer and cell phone use classes for our members. I would also like to publicize the good work the Senior Center and Thrift Store does for seniors and the community.

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