

COVID-19

Continued vigilance needed

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category based on its case count over a 14-day period. The "extreme risk" case count is 60 or more. Wasco County was as high as 175 in early December.

In the most recent 14-day count, covering Jan. 31 to Feb. 13, Wasco County had 53 cases. That was enough to drop it to "high risk" category, which is 45-59 cases over 14 days. (Moderate risk is 30 to 44 cases over 14 days.) However, risk category changes only happen every other week. Next week is a change week, new category changes will be announced Tuesday, Feb. 23, with the change taking effect Friday, Feb. 26.

Wasco County has recorded just 27 cases since Feb. 7, which is the beginning of the upcoming 14-day period ending Feb. 20.

Dropping from "extreme" to "high" category would allow in-person dining at 25 percent capacity; gyms to have 25 percent capacity; and in-person visits at long term care facilities. Dropping to the "moderate" risk category allows 50 percent in-person dining capacity; and 50 percent capacity at gyms. Churches can have 50 percent indoor capacity.

North Central Public Health District Health Officer Dr. Miriam McDonnell said the drop in cases is a combination of several factors, including the end of the holiday case surge and an increasing county vaccination rate, which is now at 12 percent of the population.

McDonnell also credited the public with following the extreme risk category guidance, and "the continued good work" of people to wash their hands, stay 6-foot apart and wear a mask. "There are some counties moving in the wrong direction. We need to continue what we are doing, taking precautions, so we can get to the next level."

Vaccinations are key to ending the pandemic, she added. In the meantime, residents are asked to continue to wear a mask, stay 6-foot apart from those not in their household, avoid gatherings, wash hands frequently and stay home when sick.

McDonnell told the Wasco County Commission Wednesday, Feb. 24, that ongoing testing was robust so declining case numbers were not the result of missed cases. "Case counts really are down."

Volunteers at Mid-Columbia Senior Center are helping contact eligible seniors, and vaccine scheduling has become more predictable, despite delays due to winter storms nationwide.

She asked those who have received their vaccination to inform their personal care provider, which will reduce duplication of efforts and make it easier to track who has and who has not received the vaccine. "The data is in the state system, but not readily available," she explained.

Having the Fort Dalles Readiness Center as a vaccine site has been a blessing, McDonnell added, and as vaccinations continue to ramp up, daily clinics will be held at the site.

VACCINE UPDATES

Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties

North Central Public Health District is now providing weekly vaccine updates and distribution statistics for Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties.

A number of entities are now providing vaccinations in the three county area, including NCPHD, Mid-Columbia Medical Center (MCMC), Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue, One Community Health, Sherman County Medical Clinic in Moro, Arlington Health Center and South Gilliam Health Center in Condon. Deschutes Rim Clinic in Maupin begins vaccinations this week.

Local long-term care facility residents and staff were vaccinated by national pharmacy chains. There is very limited availability through some local pharmacies for those

eligible to receive the vaccine, check their websites for more information.

Through Feb. 13, the entities listed below have administered 5,517 vaccines, including first and second doses. The breakdown of vaccines by agency or group is:

- North Central Public Health District: 1,995 cumulative doses; 370 the week ending Feb. 13.
- Sherman County Medical Center: 221 cumulative, 84 the week ending Feb. 13.
- Mid-Columbia Medical Center: 1,307 cumulative, 235 the week ending Feb. 13.
- One Community Health: 256 cumulative; none the week ending Feb. 13.
- Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue: 332 cumulative doses; 0 the week ending Feb. 13. (MCFR has completed its vaccine work, which included first responders.)
- Arlington Health Center: 10 cumulative; 10 the week ending Feb. 13.

• South Gilliam Health Center: 20 cumulative; 20 the week ending Feb. 13.

• Local long term care facilities: 1,406 cumulative doses. (Long term care facilities have completed their doses.)

Vaccines are being given to health-care providers, emergency responders, educators and childcare providers and now, those 75 and older.

NCPHD is working to distribute the vaccine as soon as it is received. The ability to vaccinate is determined by how vaccine is received from the state each week, as well as state guidelines about who is currently eligible to get them.

For more information, visit COVID-19 Vaccine in Oregon or visit NCPHD online www.ncphd.org or wascoshermangilliamcovid19.com.

Vaccine registration

Residents should sign up for

vaccination when they become eligible under state guidelines. In Oregon, those 70 years of age and older are now eligible. Residents 65 and older become eligible March 1. In central Oregon, visit covidvaccine.oregon.gov, ncphd.org or wascoshermangilliamcovid19.com. Residents can also call 211, text ORCOVID to 898211 or email ORCOVID@211info.org. In Hood River, vaccine lines are available in English at 541-399-8022 and Spanish at 541-399-8023, or contact your primary care provider.

In Washington, call 1-800-525-0127 or 1888-856-5816, email covid.vaccine@doh.wa.gov, text the word "Coronavirus" to 211211 or visit www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/vaccine online.

In Washington, all seniors 65 and older are eligible to receive the vaccine, and those 50 years or older in multigenerational households.

Klickitat County vaccine details can be found on page 14.

HR County ready to serve more people than it has COVID vaccines available

By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

Hood River County Health Department director Trish Elliott said the local system is prepared to vaccinate thousands of people but is getting doses in the hundreds, and decried the lack of supply coming to the department and to primary care providers (PCPs) the county works with to distribute and administer the vaccine.

"We are not getting as much as want," Elliott said. A total of 250 new doses were shared among PCPs last week and, of a shipment this week, 600 are second doses and 50 are new.

According to the Health Department, statewide there are more than 750,000 people aged 65 or older. While Oregon has already vaccinated more than 100,000 people aged 60 and older, state health officials estimate it will take until mid-April to vaccinate more than 7 in 10 Oregon seniors. All people over 65 are now eligible — if they can get it.

"It is very frustrating for us as we are not getting the amount of vaccine," Elliott told the Hood River County

Board of Commissioners last week. "We would really like to get those vaccines out to those older populations. It looks like going forward the state has committed to sending Hood River County 300 doses per week for net few weeks, and I'm disappointed with that. That's pretty common number of doses they are giving to counties our size even though we have a lot more capacity to give vaccines than what we're giving."

All people over 65 should plan to be immunized by their primary care provider once providers have vaccine. The county is currently scheduling vaccinations to complete Phase 1a — second doses and Phase 1b, Groups 1 and 2 (see related story, page A1). If you are in one of these groups and have not been contacted by the Health Department, send an email to covidvaccine@co.hood-river.or.us; if you do not have email, call 541-387-6911.

Elliott told the board that her department and PCPs "are working extra hard to get people in, and we have a standby list at the end

of every clinic day that we can get people in within a 15-minute timespan so we don't waste."

People able to respond within 15 minutes "are just like gold for us, we feel like we're finally doing something positive in this fight against COVID in our community and we want to maximize every dose we have."

Elliott cleared up what she called a recent rumor about wasted COVID vaccines, saying that out of the 2,000 doses handled so far, there have been exactly two losses: One was caused by a faulty needle and syringe set, and the other was blown by the wind from a table at an outside clinic, and was spoiled as a result.

"It's all going into peoples' arms except for those two situations," she said.

Elliott noted that the syringe sets come from a federal stockpile, "and are different with each shipment. Sometimes they work well and sometimes they don't. You just never know what you're going to get."

Elliott said the county has recorded 1,045 total pandemic cases, including 22 active ones, a total of 34

hospitalizations, and 29 deaths.

"We are continuing with vaccine efforts, with clinics each week for past 5-6 weeks," Elliott said. "We've been very productive. We would be more so if we could get more vaccine. We're ready to go to be out there sharing vaccines with our community partners and it is frustrating we're not able to that vaccine to get it out there."

This week's clinic at River of Life Assembly in Hood River involves 650 doses, mostly second doses.

Elliott reported that the county has been setting up and using a new online scheduler with automated processes that will save us a lot of time and effort with scheduling and making sure we get recalls in time.

Most local vaccines are distributed through health providers, and anyone who

has a primary care provider (PCP) should contact that office. Those without a PCP should call 541-387-6911.

Safeway pharmacy in Hood River recently received its first allocation, 100 doses, under a separate vaccine pipeline provided by the federal government.

Elliott said One Community Health will receive 200 doses per week for clients living in Hood River, Wasco and Sherman counties starting Feb. 22. (OCH has clinics in The Dalles and Hood River.)

"We are going to get at least 300 doses every week starting Feb. 22. We know we can at least count on parsing out that much to PCPs, but OCH will also be getting some and it will be great if Safeway will continue to get them, and to get as many people in these age groups vaccinated as soon as possible," Elliott said.

Oregon Short Film Festival Winter 2021 held at Sunshine Mill

The Dalles - The seventh edition of the Oregon Short Film Festival will take place on Feb. 25-28 at the Sunshine Mill Winery And Drive-Up Theater and presented by Film Festival Circuit.

"We are so excited to be able to continue putting on film festivals in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic," said Mikel Fair, director of Film Festival Circuit, LLC. "We're grateful spaces like Sunshine Mill have found a unique way to continue our passion of bringing films to the big screen."

Film Festival Circuit is a partnership of eight different Film Festival Events in the United States, which accepts film and screenplay

submissions from international independent filmmakers.

Two hundred independent short films of all genres have been selected to be screened this February and the price for tickets is \$35 per car, per day. Tickets can be purchased online through

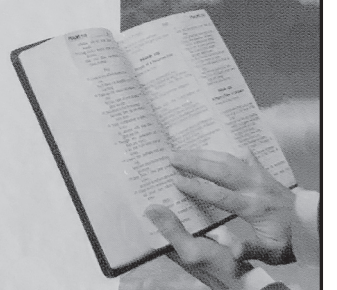
Eventbrite.

For a complete list of this year's official selections for films, videos, screenplays and teleplays visit Film Festival Circuit's website, info.filmfestivalcircuit.com/blog/oregon-short-film-festival-winter-2021.

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