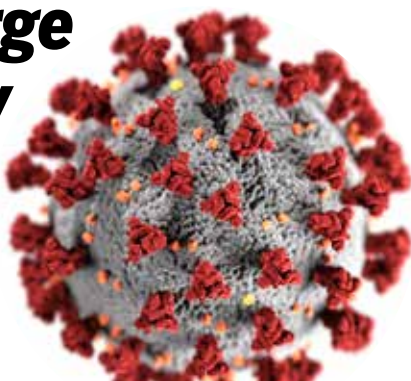


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Caution tape wraps around the playground at Thompson Park in The Dalles, closed by statewide mandates. Park facilities are closed, but most parks are available to pedestrians seeking to get outside. Photo by Mak B. Gibson



Two Gorge Quilters and Scott McKay, director of the Mid-Columbia Senior Center in The Dalles, are pictured — standing six feet apart — with masks the quilting group is making and distributing to Meals on Wheels drivers and others. Contributed photo

Precautions increase as COVID-19 spreads

By Emily Fitzgerald
News staff writer

As COVID-19 continues to spread, local agencies have ramped up their efforts to enforce social distancing guidelines while supporting their communities through the pandemic.

While Oregon Health Authority has confirmed a total of 266 cases of COVID-19 — including 10 fatalities — throughout the State of Oregon since the start of the outbreak, Hood River and Wasco counties had no cases to contribute to those rising numbers until this week.

Wasco County had its first presumptive positive case of COVID-19 confirmed the evening of March 25 out of the Oregon Veterans' Home in The Dalles. The individual, a male resident in the 60-80 age range, had no known contact with a confirmed case and had not traveled to a country where the virus is circulating, so the case is being investigated as a community-acquired case, said an Oregon Health Authority press release. They have been in isolation since March 19.

"On behalf of North Central Public Health District, I would like to extend support to those affected

by the diagnosis of COVID-19 in this beloved individual who served our country, and to commend the incredible work of the staff of Oregon Veterans' Home in The Dalles. They have worked diligently and tirelessly to care for their residents," said Dr. Miriam McDonnell, health officer for North Central Public Health District.

"We are doing our utmost to combat the spread of this disease, and to provide information, resources and guidance to all in Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties," McDonnell said. "In these times of uncertainty and hardship, I know the compassion and integrity of our residents will enable us to protect our most vulnerable, and provide help to any neighbors in need."

Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties have formed a Unified Command to respond to the many challenges COVID-19 brings to the residents of these counties; Hood River County has activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to support local partner agencies and community members.

Hood River County confirmed its first COVID-19 case Sunday afternoon.

The patient is an adult, county officials confirmed, but no further identifying information has been released due to concerns for the patient's privacy. "As we have seen in other communities throughout the world, more cases will likely be identified in the coming weeks," said the health department in an official release.

Hood River County Chair Mike Oates, City of Hood River Mayor Kate McBride, and City of Cascade Locks Mayor Tom Cramblett issued a joint statement Wednesday endorsing Gov. Kate Brown's March 23 "Stay Home, Save Lives" order and calling residents to follow social distancing protocols.

"ALL OF US ARE RESPONSIBLE for limiting contacts and stopping person-to-person transmission of the virus. The sacrifices required of our local businesses have been significant and painful. We will only get through this and get everyone back to work by preventing the spread of this virus," reads the statement. "...We will get through this together. Our spirits have been lifted by the generous and resilient spirit of our community during the

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Protective gear needed

Protection Equipment donated — and created -- in three new efforts

Local doctors are supporting the Hood River County Health Department by conducting donation drop-offs three times a week for masks, gowns, and other protective gear used in the medical and first response fields.

Dr. Christopher Van Tilburg, county health officer, is overseeing the stockpiling and distribution of PPEs, to relieve a Gorge-wide shortage in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak and rising demand for PPE.

"Currently, our supplies are running low and we are asking for help from the community with PPE donations," said Dr. Christopher Swisher, a Hood River pediatric dentist. "These donations will help protect our first responders. We are looking for any PPE equipment, but are specifically short of masks, gowns, and gloves. Respirators and N95 masks are the most protective masks for first responders."

The program is accepting used and new masks and other equipment Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 1-2 p.m., until further notice at the Hood River County building, on Sixth and State, in downtown Hood River.

PPE donations days start March 27 at the Hood River County

building. Donations will be accepted on the exterior of the building to limit exposure indoors and practice safe distancing.

"The community has really stepped up and the Health Department is trying to implement this in the most efficient way possible," Van Tilburg said. "We're reserving all these PPE (donated) for health care providers and first responders. The Health Department has done a couple of rounds of PPE distribution. Community distribution will go into the next round of distribution, which will be next week," he said Thursday.

Organizers are also reaching out to industries to donate gear.

Makers, funders step up

In addition to the donation effort, what amounts to a three-part rallying of forces to create new PPE is underway in the Gorge, under the aegis of Van Tilburg and Hood River County Health.

Gorge Makers Collective is a newly-formed volunteer group formed due to a shortage of medical masks during the COVID-19 crisis, for creating specially-designed cloth masks for health care providers and other seeking facial protection. A group of local residents have banded together to create the masks and to form teams of cutters and sewers. The home of Kirk and Cherie Zack is pickup point for materials. For details see the group's Facebook

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Some pantries close, food distribution continues

Food banks continue operation in Hood River, Wasco and Sherman counties

by Mark Gibson
The Dalles Chronicle

Many food pantries in the Gorge have suspended services due to facility restrictions and staffing needs, but communities continue to be served, according to the Columbia Gorge Food Bank (CGFB).

All The Dalles' were closed as of Thursday, March 26, except for the Salvation Army's downtown facility, which has expanded its pantry hours to five days a week.

The Columbia Gorge Food Bank announced Tuesday the St. Vincent de Paul pantry and Windy River Gleaners are closed until further notice; in Hood River, FISH Food Bank Hood River is no longer distributing food on Saturdays; and The Salvation Army pantry in The Dalles will be open five days a week with expanded hours.

In a notice from Windy River Gleaners, organizers noted the pantry closed because the building does not allow for them to follow new rules set by the state. "We are asking everyone to remain at home and stay safe so when this passes we can all see each other

again," organizers said in a Facebook post.

St. Vincent de Paul continues to provide Community Meals, with patrons served outside the facility due to restrictions on the number of individuals allowed in the building at one time.

The food pantry operated by the Salvation Army at Wahtonka school has been temporarily closed, and that evening distribution program is now at the downtown location, 623 E. Third St., The Dalles. As a result, that pantry is currently open Monday and Wednesday, 1-3 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday, 3-6 p.m.

Capt. Raymond Morris of The Dalles Salvation Army noted that working in emergency situations is "what we do."

"We have expanded our hours and our days of operation, to better meet the needs of the community and reduce having large congregations gathering outside the building," Morris said.

Food distribution has changed, Morris said. "We are doing a drive-up deliveries, and a walk-up deliveries for those who do not have a vehicle."

Those walking are asked to keep a six-foot distance between each other. Those driving up are asked not to exit their car.

"Folks are driving up, we get their information and then they pull forward. A couple of staff members grab a small or medium food box, as needed, or both for a larger family," Morris explained. "We try to keep as simple as possible. We ask them not to get out of car,



Food boxes are being distributed curbside at the Salvation Army in The Dalles, which is currently in operation five days a week. Patrons in vehicles are asked to remain in their cars, and those on foot are asked to maintain six feet between themselves and others. Contributed photo

we put it on a seat or into the trunk" Staff are also observing safety precautions as recommended by the CDC, like wearing protective masks and washing down carts. The Salvation Army is also working with

the Columbia Gorge Food Bank by helping deliver food outside the city in areas served by the CGFB where that organization is

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