

EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2018

142nd Year, No. 56

WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

Beware the flu

Flu season takes off; not too late to vaccinate

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Influenza activity spiked this week in Oregon, but procrastinators still have time to get their flu shots.

Dr. Ann Thomas, a public health physician for the Oregon Health Authority, said flu season took off dramatically in the last couple weeks.

“Last season, we doubled our hospitalizations (from 800 to 1,500),” she said. “This year is looking like another record year — and not in a good way.”

The state is experiencing intense and widespread flu activity. More than 120 people were hospitalized with flu-like symptoms in Portland during the week ending Dec. 23 — the most recent week reported. The state doesn’t track hospitalizations outside the metro area, but Umatilla County hospitals are also seeing an uptick.

“We’ve been seeing more positive cases,” said Nick Bejarano, spokesman for Good Shepherd Medical Center. “We’re seeing cases earlier in the season and more frequently.”

Since Dec. 1, 88 patients tested positive for flu in Good Shepherd’s emergency department, Bejarano said, 77 for influenza A and 11 for influenza B.

St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton is also seeing an upswing.

“The flu is here,” said St. Anthony Hospital spokesman Larry Blanc.

He knew of four people currently admitted with influenza-like illness and said ER doctors are testing more patients with flu-like symptoms. So far, 16 patients tested positive (11 for A and five for B). Of those 16 patients, four said they had been vaccinated.

A station with masks and hand sanitizer now sits near St. Anthony’s entryway for visitors who haven’t been vaccinated or suspect they might be ill. It’s a similar scenario at Good Shepherd. Unvaccinated employees at both hospitals must don masks.

Dr. Jon Hitzman, a family physician and the county

See FLU/8A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A sledder races down a hill in the sno-park at Andies Prairie on Monday east of Tollgate.

Sno-parks galore in Eastern Ore



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A pair of snowshoers stop to talk to a man with his snow bike on a mixed-use trail at Andies Prairie sno-park Monday east of Tollgate.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Horseshoe Prairie nordic ski area offers cross country skiers and snowshoers nearly 10 miles of marked trails.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A pair of snowmobilers ride down a mixed-use trail in Andies Prairie sno-park Monday east of Tollgate.

The best spots to snowshoe, ski, sled and more

By TIM TRAINOR
East Oregonian

As winter reaches its peak in Eastern Oregon, many residents are looking for opportunities to bust through the inversion into playgrounds of deep snow beneath blue skies.

Luckily, the region has numerous options for affordable recreation on public lands — no matter what kind of recreating you like to do. In many cases, an Oregon sno-park is nothing more than a plowed parking lot that abuts prime public recreation land. Snowmobilers, snowshoers, skiers and sledders may look to different parks in the area for one that best fits their favorite form of recreation.

But according to Mark Penninger, acting public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, there is little information available about how many people use sno-parks in the region, as well as their preferred mode of travel once they get there.

“We don’t have quantitative information about use,” he said. “It’s not something we’ve collected before.”

Partly that’s because no two winters look the same. According to Penninger, crews could not plow all of last year’s snow in some parks, whereas this year a four-wheel drive car with proper tires can get many places in Eastern Oregon forests.

See SNOW/8A

Delays in air quality inspections, permits could pose health risks

5.8 percent of all permits behind as of July 2017

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — State auditors say that a backlog in permits and inspections at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality “endanger the state’s air quality and the health of Oregonians.”

DEQ is responsible for monitoring and regulating emissions from industrial sources and enforcing violations. The department also oversees land and water quality.

But nearly a quarter of air quality permit renewals were behind schedule in the past decade, according to the audit. Overall, about 5.8 percent of all permits were behind as of July 2017.

But some types of permits have

more severe backlogs than others, with 43.1 percent of the agency’s larger and more complex permits in “backlog status.”

And there’s also a delay in inspections of industrial sources of pollution. This could mean that those businesses are out of compliance and potentially emitting harmful levels of pollutants.

But auditors weren’t able to identify the size of the total inspection backlog because DEQ, which is

divided into three regions, doesn’t track inspections agency-wide.

Those delays could pose serious risks to environmental and human health in Oregon, auditors said.

Air quality permits specify how much and what types of emissions a business is allowed to emit in accordance with state and federal laws and rules.

Certain air pollutants can have

See DEQ/8A

