

Approaches: ‘We have a simple message for all countries — test, test, test’

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off-reservation, a radius that stops before cities like The Dalles, Baker City and Richland, Washington, if people were traveling from Mission. If residents traveled more than 75 miles, especially by air, the tribes told them to self-quarantine for one to two weeks.

Jiselle Halfmoon, a spokeswoman for the tribes' COVID-19 Incident Command, said tribal medical executives had been monitoring the virus since late last year and the Board of Trustees were prepared to act once the disease reached Eastern Oregon.

“We almost expected this to come,” she said. “I believe that’s why we were ready for it, and we took preventive and proactive measures to be able to put things in place once it started impacting our community directly.”

Despite the different approaches, Halfmoon said the tribes weren't influenced by what other local governments were or weren't doing.

“It was general prevention on our part, not a response to anybody else's lack of action,” she said.

Regardless of the local response, all Oregonians have experienced an upheaval of their lives.

On Monday, Gov. Kate Brown banned gatherings of more than 25 people and ordered all bars and restaurants to close statewide. On Tuesday, she extended the statewide school closure until April 28.

And then on Friday, the state announced 26 new cases of coronavirus, which was Oregon's largest single-day increase so far and brings the state's total number of cases to more than 100.

But for Umatilla County, there have been no additional cases of COVID-19 identified since March 11 and both people who tested positive have recovered.

“It's hard to wrap your mind around this because the steps the governor is taking is not because of the situation we're in, they're because of the situation we could be

COVID-19 CHRONOLOGY

STATE OF OREGON

FEB. 28

The Oregon Health Authority announces first case of COVID-19 in Oregon.



MARCH 2

OHA announces first case of COVID-19 in Umatilla County.

MARCH 8

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declares state of emergency.

MARCH 11

The World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic. Gov. Brown announces statewide ban on gatherings over 250 people.

MARCH 12

Gov. Brown orders all schools to close beginning March 16 as Oregon reports 24 total cases of COVID-19.



MARCH 13

President Donald Trump declares national emergency.



MARCH 14

First Oregonian dies from COVID-19.

MARCH 16

Gov. Brown announces ban on gatherings over 25 people, restricts restaurants to takeout and delivery.



MARCH 18

Two more people die from COVID-19 as case total rises to 75.

UMATILLA COUNTY

MARCH 2

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock takes emergency flight home from conference in Washington D.C.

MARCH 5

Murdock says three samples from Umatilla County residents tested negative for COVID-19.

MARCH 5-7

OSAA 2A State Basketball Championships played at Pendleton Convention Center.



MARCH 11

Second "presumptive positive" COVID-19 case announced in Umatilla County.

MARCH 12

Umatilla County declares a "state of alert."



MARCH 13

President Donald Trump declares national emergency.

MARCH 18

Umatilla County, Morrow County and Pendleton declare a state of emergency, close or restrict access to public buildings.



CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE UMATILLA INDIAN RESERVATION

MARCH 2

CTUIR declares state of emergency, closes Wildhorse, Nixyaawii Community School, Head Start, Daycare and Senior Center for cleaning until March 4 and cancels all community events for the week.

MARCH 6

Board of Trustees Chairwoman Kat Brigham reports cases of anti-tribal discrimination following first COVID-19 case at a coronavirus roundtable hosted by Rep. Greg Walden.

MARCH 12

CTUIR establishes COVID-19 Incident Command, names tribal spokesman Chuck Sams incident commander.

MARCH 13

CTUIR cancels all community events except Wildhorse fireworks show, recommends residents don't travel more than 75 miles off reservation.

MARCH 14

CTUIR announces it will temporarily stop disconnecting water services for nonpayment.

MARCH 16

Tribes limit access to Nixyaawii Governance Center.

MARCH 17

CTUIR announces partial closure of Wildhorse Casino & Resort, including casino floor, from March 18 to April 8.

MARCH 18

CTUIR temporarily halts evictions in tribal housing, agrees to pay nonworking Wildhorse employees for two weeks.



East Oregonian Graphic/Andy Nicolais

in,” Fiumara said. “While this seems like a quick escalation over nothing, or very little, it's actually an escalation based on the data that's coming out that says if we do nothing, it could be very bad.”

Fiumara acknowledged the lack of new diagnoses doesn't mean there aren't other cases out there. And while he confirmed “some testing” has been done in Umatilla County, he wouldn't say exactly how many have been conducted at this point.

“When you've got small numbers, they become very easy to identify when people start grabbing bits of information from different sources,” he said. “As these numbers get larger, we will start kicking them out.”

According to Fiumara, the county knows when a test result is in, but doesn't know of every test that's pending

from Umatilla County.

Dr. James Winde, Yellowstone Tribal Health Center medical director, said the Umatilla Indian Reservation health clinic doesn't have testing capabilities.

Should a tribal member report coronavirus symptoms to Yellowhawk, and doctors suspect COVID-19 after an examination, Winde said the clinic would send the patient to a hospital for further testing.

If a tribal member tests positive, Winde said the process would follow Oregon Health Authority reporting guidelines and begin coordinating with Umatilla County Public Health.

He said he didn't know if the tribes would acquire testing capabilities in the future given the rapidly changing landscape, but demand from individual tribal members

wasn't high.

“Not that many,” he said. “Less than I would have anticipated.”

Other Oregon counties, such as Lane County, have released specific testing data about its residents.

But after being cautious to not stir panic with a premature emergency declaration, Fiumara said the health department is now considering releasing the number of people tested for the same reason.

“We're hoping it can tamp down some of the fear in the area that there are some tests happening and they're coming back negative,” he said.

Yet, as of Friday, it remained unclear when testing will be widely available in Eastern Oregon.

“It's hard to give a timeline, but there are activities happening on multiple fronts

to find ways to expand that,” Fiumara said. “Yes, there's been limited testing happening, but our sense really is there's much more influenza, more common cold and other respiratory illnesses circulating. Just because someone has a cough and a fever in Umatilla County, chances are it's not COVID. I can't say that it's not, but chances are that it's not.”

The only way for that to be known would be for more people to be tested, which is precisely what the World Health Organization is saying should be done.

“We have a simple message for all countries — test, test, test,” Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Tuesday.

National COVID-19 testing was ramping up Friday as the total U.S. cases surpassed

13,000, and Brown said Thursday that 20,000 testing kits were headed to Oregon soon.

But as it stands, Hitzman said labs around the country are overwhelmed and estimated it'd take up to 10 days for a test result to come back on a sample collected Friday that goes through a commercial lab.

Hitzman also offered some optimism, pointing out that Wuhan, China, where the virus was first identified in December 2019, has reopened some factories just four months later.

“It is conceivable that what we see happen is that four months from now this may be a nightmare we wished we hadn't lived through,” he said.

For now, Umatilla County residents will have to live through a nightmare they don't know the full extent of.

Parents: Although libraries are closed they still offer a plethora of resources

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more formal lessons with students, the “school day” can be much shorter.

“When you're home, a lesson that might take an hour at public school might take 20 minutes with your kid because they have that really good one-on-one time,” she said. “You don't need to explain things multiple times for the kids not paying attention in the back.”

Street said if parents are just looking for ways to temporarily provide educational opportunities for their children, and not committing to a homeschooling lifestyle permanently, there are plenty of free resources online they can use instead of investing in expensive textbooks and other materials.

One of those resources, locally, is the Hermiston Public Library. While the library building is currently closed to visitors, people can still call to order books for pickup outside, and the library offers a long list of digital resources, found at

<https://hermistonlibrary.us/os>.

Library director Mark Rose said it's not too late for Hermiston residents to get a library card to access such services — just call 541-567-2882 to provide the necessary information and be issued a library card number. For people who don't live in the city, some of the resources listed on the library's website don't require a library card to access.

“Because of the state library and other things of that nature, we have huge amounts of resources,” Rose said.

Those resources go beyond just audiobooks and e-books and include services, such as Bookflix, which help young children read a digital picture book along with a narrator, and offer questions afterward to gauge their understanding.

“We've had pretty good use of it, and I think it will be a good resource for people now,” Rose said.

TumbleBook, an online library that also includes videos and comic books, is mak-



EO file photo

Oregon Connections Academy students work on projects in 2014. Online schools are one option parents are turning to in order to keep their children busy during the six-week school closure.

ing its services free to all Americans during the current outbreak, along with a collection of math activities on TumbleMath.

Another resource for families is Beanstack, a reading challenge service that allows people to track their reading hours.

Rose said now is the time for parents to get creative about keeping their children informed and entertained.

He said if people are looking for a specific resource on the internet to help them do so, but haven't been able to find it, librarians at the Hermiston library are happy to take their call and help them out.

“Finding things online is supposed to be easy, but it's not always, and our staff have experience in that,” he said.

As families wait to hear whether Oregon students will actually return to the class-

room on April 29 as planned, some parents have written in community forums on Facebook that they plan to withdraw their child's enrollment from their local school completely and switch to a virtual charter school, such as Connections Academy. It is unclear yet how the Oregon Department of Education will handle that phenomenon, as schools usually get funding from the state on a per-student basis, meaning drops in enrollment hurt districts financially.

Hermiston School District has put together a list of some educational resources parents can use on their website, at bit.ly/2UaOaXn. District communications officer Maria Duron stated in an email that the list was not the answer to questions about what learning will look like for students throughout the outbreak, but is meant to be a resource for caregivers looking for ideas.

For parents who are just looking for ways to keep their child entertained in an educational way over the break

from school, many companies and nonprofits are stepping up.

Scholastic, for example, has launched a free Learn at Home program that offers “20 days” worth of active learning journeys designed to reinforce and sustain educational opportunities for those students who are unable to attend school,” according to their website.

Students can take a virtual tour of now-closed museums and zoos around the world by visiting artsandculture.google.com, which uses the same technology as Google Street View to allow users to “walk” the halls of everything from the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Australian National Surfing Museum. Or they can use street level mapping technology through www.geoguessr.com to race to guess where in the world they have been “dropped.”

The American Dairy Association North East is offering virtual tours of farms, catered to different age levels.

Testing: ‘The national media must take culpability for whipping up the public’

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care personnel with symptoms who had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient.

Even with the strict criteria, “the state lab received 167 specimens on Wednesday,” Hitzman said. “There is clearly a backlog. They just don't have the capacity.”

Most other samples go to one of three large commercial labs: LabCorp, University of Washington Virology and Quest Diagnostics.

As the World Health Organization urges nations to test every suspected case, the U.S. is nowhere close to that point.

Things are changing almost hourly though, the physicians said. Testing will soon become more available. In a press conference on Tuesday, Gov. Kate Brown said she expects federal authorities to release a million new tests next week and millions more in the weeks to come.

“You should see our testing capacity ramp up,” Brown said. “I won't say exponentially, but substantially this week as we expand testing capacity through a private provider.”

Another issue is a shortage of RNA extraction kits needed by labs to diagnose the novel coronavirus. Qia-

gen, the Netherlands company that produces the bulk of the kits, is ramping up production in the face of overwhelming global demand.

Interpath Laboratory, headquartered in Pendleton, knows the complexities of COVID-19 testing. Marketing Director Judy Kennedy explained how headache-inducing it can be. Interpath does about 97 percent of its own testing, but is not yet set up to test for COVID-19. So Interpath has been sending nasal samples to ARUP Laboratory in Utah. When ARUP met capacity, Kennedy said, ARUP made arrangements with LabCorp, which also

met capacity.

“What we have here is a flow from lab to lab,” she said. “There's such a demand that no one can keep up.”

About 30 one-to-two-day-old specimens (collected from around the United States) are sitting in Interpath frozen storage ready to go somewhere. Kennedy said they just worked out an agreement with a lab in Tennessee.

The pandemic, she said, has tested the ingenuity of laboratories.

“It was a brand-new virus, so nobody had the testing,” Kennedy said.

As testing becomes more prevalent, the pandemic will

continue to come into focus.

“With more and faster testing,” Townsley said, “we're going to find out how pervasive it is. This community likely has COVID-19 in it.”

Hitzman agreed with that but also chided the media for overreacting.

“The national media must take culpability for whipping up the public,” he said. “It's probably important to consider that over 30,000 people in the U.S. die every year from influenza and we don't see the same level of hysteria.”

Despite that sentiment, Hitzman urges people to wash their hands, use hand

sanitizer and socially isolate.

“Kate Brown has done a remarkable job in closing schools and closing restaurants,” he said. “We're not going to know the answer for two weeks.”

The doctors urged people who start experiencing symptoms to stay at home. Instead, they should call their health care provider and arrange for a consultation by phone, email or video.

“A lot of providers, including myself and other clinics, can do telemedicine visits so people don't have to leave their houses,” Harrison said. “That way, they aren't spreading the risk.”