

Oregon rural hospitals losing revenue, laying off workers

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

SALEM — Rural community hospitals in Oregon are seeing revenue plunge and resorting to laying off and firing employees to cope with a ban on elective surgeries while health officials battle the coronavirus outbreak.

Some hospitals have seen revenue decline as much as 60% in a month, said Becky Hultberg, CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems.

“Staffing is one of the hospital’s most significant costs. So as revenue declines, some hospitals have been forced to furlough or lay off staff,” she said.

Hospitals in the state have enough capacity to handle an expected peak in virus cases later this month, according to projections, but the association says it’s too early to relax the restrictions.

Hospitals in other states are also losing revenue. On Wednesday, 19 U.S. senators — Democrat and Republican — warned that “with-out intervention, COVID-19 will close hundreds of rural hospitals across the country, and tens of thousands of rural patients will lose access to their nearest emergency room.”



Health care workers wheel a gurney into Salem Hospital’s emergency room on April 9, 2020, in Salem.

The senators, including Democrat Jeff Merkley of Oregon, told U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar that a \$100 billion federal relief fund for health care providers should prioritize rural facilities, with 20% directed to the operations.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on March 17 ordered that all elective and nonurgent medical procedures be canceled or rescheduled until at least June 15 to preserve masks and other protective equipment for the state’s COVID-19 response.

Some hospitals also lost revenue because fewer people visited emergency rooms, opting instead for virtual visits with a medical professional, fearing an ER could expose them to the virus.

Claims for unemployment insurance reflect the scope of the job losses. In the past week, the Oregon Employment Department received 8,800 unemployment claims from workers in health care and social assistance fields, up from 396 three weeks earlier. Only accommodation-food ser-

vices workers filed more claims.

In Oregon’s remote southwest corner along the Pacific Ocean, Curry Health Network has laid off, furloughed or cut back the hours of 192 employees. That’s more than half of the staff who work in the network’s hospital in Gold Beach and several medical clinics. Managers, meanwhile, took a 20% reduction in pay.

“We work on a very small margin,” said Cheryl McDermott, a spokeswoman for Curry Health Network. “If we can’t do

elective procedures, patient volume is dropping and it has a very strong financial impact. Additional funding is definitely needed for us and other hospitals throughout the United States.”

Sara Dickerson, a family nurse practitioner, was laid off by the network on Tuesday.

“What is most upsetting to me was the treatment of my medical assistant, who was terminated on March 31,” Dickerson told the *Curry Coastal Pilot* newspaper. She said the assistant now has no medical insurance.

The Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems has asked the governor for \$200 million in new state funding to be allocated directly to hospitals to address urgent needs and keep providing services.

The state, however, is also expected to have less money because the newly unemployed are no longer paying income taxes.

Hultberg said her group recognizes that significant budget challenges lie ahead but added: “People count on hospitals in a crisis.”

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, a Republican representing a wide swath of Eastern and Central Oregon, has also urged that rural hospi-

tals be prioritized for money approved by Congress.

“Our rural community hospitals are struggling financially right now in large part because the governor shut down any elective procedures,” Walden said.

Oregon is not expected to see a big spike in COVID-19 cases as long as people keep staying home and maintain social distancing when out on urgent errands, state health officer Dean Sidelinger said.

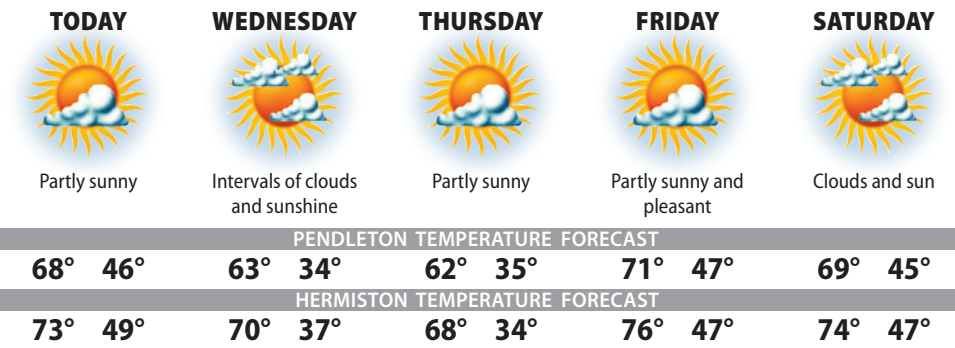
“We know it comes at a huge sacrifice,” Sidelinger said about the manageable number of cases. “People have lost their jobs. Our small and large businesses are suffering.”

The peak of the outbreak is expected around April 22 in Oregon, according to a projection by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, noting there should be more than enough hospital beds and ICU beds available.

Hultberg, however, is not advocating that restrictions on elective procedures be relaxed.

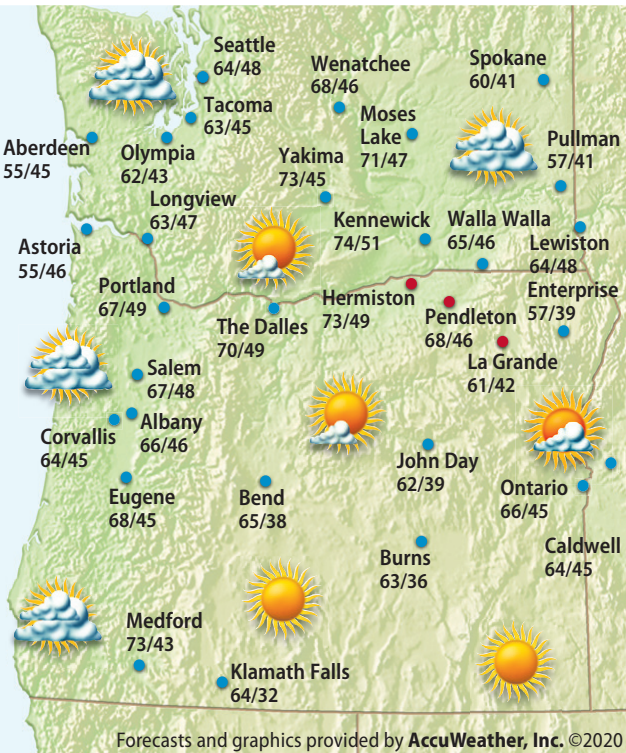
“I would rather be having the conversation today about hospital sustainability than the conversation about mortuary capacity,” Hultberg said. “It is too early to talk about changing course.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

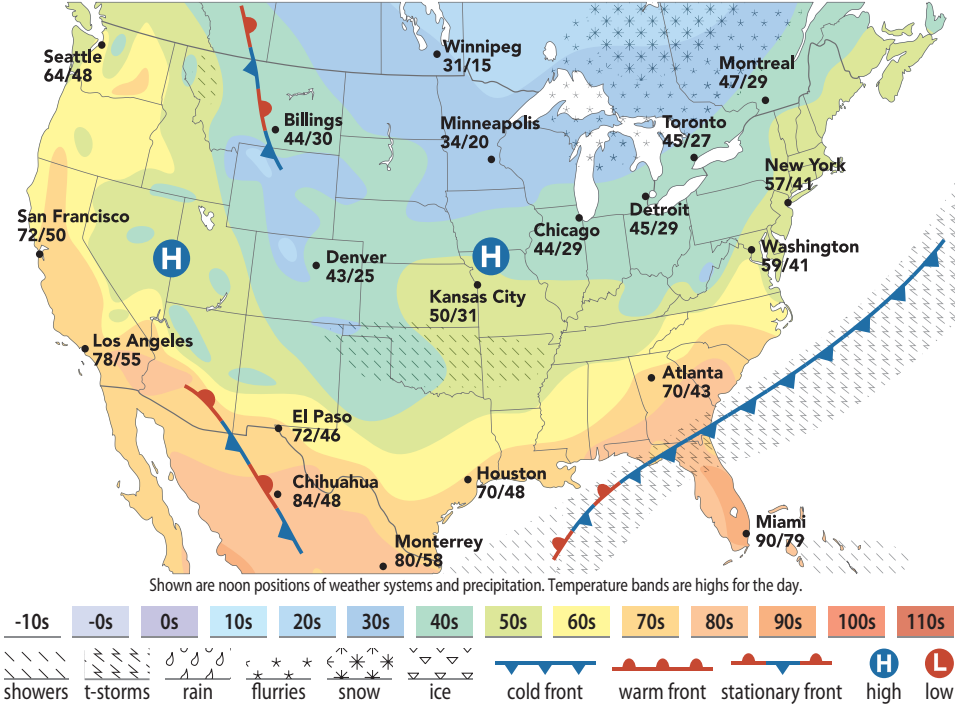
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	57°	28°	
Normals	61°	39°	
Records	92° (1904)	21° (1911)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.03"		
Normal month to date	0.55"		
Year to date	4.98"		
Last year to date	7.37"		
Normal year to date	4.55"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	62°	22°	
Normals	64°	39°	
Records	86° (1947)	21° (1968)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	Trace		
Normal month to date	0.32"		
Year to date	0.48"		
Last year to date	3.81"		
Normal year to date	3.46"		
WINDS (in mph)			
	Today	Wed.	
Boardman	WSW 7-14	NNE 6-12	
Pendleton	W 7-14	NW 6-12	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	6:11 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	7:41 p.m.		
Moonrise today	2:31 a.m.		
Moonset today	11:18 a.m.		

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 99° in Titusville, Fla. Low -15° in Lake Yellowstone, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Washington to release almost 1,000 inmates amid outbreak

By **MARTHA BELLISLE**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington state will release nearly 1,000 inmates serving time for nonviolent offenses to create more space in its prisons after a coronavirus outbreak spread in one of its largest facilities, officials said Monday.

The decision came after the state Supreme Court responded to an emergency motion filed by a group of offenders. The court ordered Gov. Jay Inslee and corrections Secretary Stephen Sinclair to submit a plan by noon Monday.

“Today, the Washington Department of Corrections takes its next steps in mitigating risk to the incarcerated population sentenced to our custody,” Sinclair said. Inslee said the plan also addresses public safety concerns.

It’s the latest move by gov-

ernors across the nation who faced possible outbreaks in their prison systems.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear has said he would release more than 900 prisoners. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine launched a similar effort that could lead to the release of 200 inmates.

In Washington state, at least 14 corrections employees and eight inmates have tested positive for the virus. Tests were pending for an additional 50 inmates and more than 900 were under quarantine orders. There are about 18,000 people incarcerated in the state.

The state’s largest outbreak is occurring at Monroe Correctional Complex where five workers and seven offenders have COVID-19.

More than 10,500 people in Washington state have tested positive and 516 people have died. Inslee issued a stay-at-home and social dis-

tancing order on March 23 and later extended it into early May.

A group of Monroe inmates asked the Washington state Supreme Court to order Inslee and Sinclair to release inmates who are 60 or older, have underlying health conditions or are close to their release date.

After a demonstration turned violent last week, lawyers for the Monroe inmates asked the court for emergency help.

On Friday, the justices ordered Inslee and Sinclair to immediately take steps to protect the health and safety of inmates in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Reducing the number of people in the prisons “is the one public health action that all objective public health experts agree is essential in order to fight the coronavirus,” said Nick Allen, an attorney for the inmates.

BRIEFLY

Washington state warns of Asian giant hornet sightings

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — The Washington state Department of Agriculture started hunting for Asian giant hornets after two confirmed sightings of the predator.

The confirmed sightings in December 2019 were accompanied by two unconfirmed but probable sightings, *The Skagit Valley Herald* reported Sunday.

The sightings were in Whatcom County along the state’s northern border.

The Asian giant hornets can attack and kill a honey bee colony within hours and scientists expect the hornet to emerge again this spring.

Tim Lawrence, director of the Washington State University Island County Extension and a honey bee expert, said the queen hornets come out of hibernation in April to feed on plant sap and fruit.

The goal is to eradicate the queens before they establish populations and pose threats to honey bees, which farmers rely on for crop pollination, Lawrence said.

The state agriculture department developed a guide that is posted on its website for members of the public who wish to assist with trapping the hornets. The traps consist of plastic bottles filled with an orange juice

and rice cooking wine mixture.

Idaho issues more than 60,000 unemployment payments

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho has issued more than 60,000 unemployment payments totaling nearly \$18 million to some 30,000 workers who have lost jobs due to the coronavirus, officials said Monday.

The Idaho Department of Labor also said that it is adjusting its phone schedule to better help those trying to make unemployment claims.

Nearly 78,000 people have filed claims since mid-March, though many have had trouble getting through on the phone.

The department said it has also reassigned workers to help process claims and hired an additional 12 claims specialists with more to be hired later.

Idaho’s unemployment rate had hovered around 3% the first 2½ months of the year. The department wasn’t updated that number yet, but the Washington-based Tax Foundation said Idaho’s unemployment late last week was running at 7.3%.

Idaho has 1,426 virus cases and 27 deaths, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally Monday afternoon.

— *Associated Press*

EAST OREGONIAN

— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —

211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

To subscribe, call 1-800-522-0255
or go online to EastOregonian.com
and click on 'Subscribe'

East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published daily except Sunday,
Monday and postal holidays, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers
Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR.
Postmaster: send address changes to
East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801.
Copyright © 2020, EO Media Group

Subscriber services:

For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops
or delivery concerns call 1-800-522-0255 ext. 1

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$13/month	60 percent
52 weeks	\$173.67	41 percent
26 weeks	\$91.86	38 percent
13 weeks	\$47.77	36 percent

*EZ Pay = one-year rate with a monthly credit
or debit card/check charge

Single copy price:
\$1.50 Tuesday through Saturday

Circulation Dept.
800-781-3214

ADVERTISING

Regional Publisher and Revenue Director:

• Christopher Rush
541-278-2669 • crush@eomediagroup.com

Advertising Manager:

• Angela Treadwell
541-966-0827 • atreadwell@eastoregonian.com

Multimedia Consultants:

• Lora Jenkins
541-276-2214 • ljenkins@eastoregonian.com

• Jeanne Jewett
541-564-4531 • jjewett@eastoregonian.com

• Audra Workman
541-564-4538 • aworkman@eastoregonian.com

Business Office Coordinator

• Dayle Stinson
541-278-2670 • dstinson@eastoregonian.com

Classified & Legal Advertising

1-800-962-2819 or 541-278-2678
classifieds@eastoregonian.com or legals@eastoregonian.com

NEWS

• To submit news tips and press releases:
call 541-966-0818 or email news@eastoregonian.com

• To submit community events, calendar items and Your EO News:
email community@eastoregonian.com or call Renee Struthers
at 541-966-0818.

• To submit engagements, weddings and anniversaries:
email rstuthers@eastoregonian.com or visit eastoregonian.
com/community/announcements

• To submit sports or outdoors information or tips:
541-966-0838 • sports@eastoregonian.com

Business Office Manager:

541-966-0824

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Production Manager: Christopher Rush
541-278-2669 • crush@eomediagroup.com