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## Tribes report sudden spike in COVID-19 cases

Surge includes 12 cases involving children between 4 and 18 years old

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

**MISSION** — The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have reported 14 new COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks, including 12 cases that involve children between the ages

of 4 and 18, according to a press release.

Each of the 12 children have or are currently experiencing symptoms, and one adult has been hospitalized, the press release said.

The outbreak appears “to have occurred among school-age children who were in the same classrooms or rode the same school buses,” though the press release did not disclose the school where the outbreak occurred. The press release added that community gatherings also contributed to the spread of infection.

The newly reported cases come after six straight weeks where not

a single case was reported among tribal members and patients eligible for care at Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center, the press release said.

But last week, tribal officials reported five new cases. And on Monday, May 10, nine new cases were reported, the press release said.

With the addition of the new cases, there are now 17 active COVID-19 cases on the reservation, the press release said. That makes this one of the sharpest upticks reported on the reservation since 19 cases were reported in a week in December 2020, according to data on the CTUIR website.

Yellowhawk officials are working to trace the outbreak, reaching out to families and close contacts, though residents have so far been reluctant to provide information, the press release said.

CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Kat Brigham is asking that community members cooperate with health officials.

“Please provide good information to help Yellowhawk protect the community. We know everyone is tired of dealing with this disease, but we must cooperate and continue to do our part to get out of this emergency,” she said. “People are experi-

encing a bigger range of symptoms so it makes getting vaccinated even more urgent.”

The new cases reported last week prompted officials to cancel several tribal events, including a fun run, a painting class, a community school prom at Nixyaawii and the Nixyaawii Celebration Committee’s Annual Root Feast Pow Wow, according to the CTUIR website.

Since the pandemic began, tribal health officials have reported 259 COVID-19 cases, 13 hospitalizations and one death, according to data on the CTUIR website as of Thursday, May 7.

### UMATILLA COUNTY

## County rethinks mental health, policing

Umatilla County officials say potential program could look similar to program used in Eugene

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

**PENDLETON** — Umatilla County officials are looking toward a possible new network of mental health professionals to assist, or possibly replace, law enforcement in responding to calls for people suffering from a mental health or addiction crisis.

The idea, officials say, would be similar to the “CAHOOTS” system in Eugene, where a two-person team of medics and mental health professionals respond to calls involving mental illness, homelessness and addiction, with an emphasis on de-escalation.

But Umatilla County, with its sprawling locale, is far different from Lane County and Eugene, and now, county officials are trying to reimagine how the system could work within the county.

“They’re police officers or corrections deputies, not mental health professionals,” Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer said. “It makes sense — let someone who’s a mental health professional deal with someone in crisis instead of law enforcement.”

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A rider runs the American flag past the bucking chutes on the opening day of the 2019 Pendleton Round-Up on Sept. 11, 2019.

# ‘Let ’er Buck’

Gov. Kate Brown optimistic 2021 Pendleton Round-Up will go forward in September

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
and **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

**SALEM** — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she “would fully expect” for the Pendleton Round-Up to go forward as planned this year, with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention like mask wearing in place.

Brown’s statement came during a press conference on Tuesday, May 11, where the state set new reopening goals

pending vaccinations.

When 70% of Oregonians over the age of 16 receive at least their first dose of the vaccine, Brown announced, capacity limits on restaurants, bars, stores, gyms and venues for athletics and entertainment, as well as limits on people who can gather for events and festivals, would be lifted.

The state also announced that individual counties with 65% of residents 16 and older at least partially vaccinated can move to lower risk starting on May 21, which allows restaurants, bars, gyms and indoor entertainment establishments to operate at half capacity.

When asked whether moving to lower risk and lifting restrictions would allow for major events like the Pendleton Round-Up, Brown said “there may be some CDC guidelines around masking that we will want to align with as we’re meeting Oregon’s needs, but I would fully expect that we will be able to Let ’er Buck, so to speak, in September.”

For the Pendleton Round-Up Associa-

tion’s board of directors, they took Brown’s comments as a positive sign that they would be able to realize their goal since they canceled the 2020 rodeo: a fully functional Round-Up in 2021 with all of the usual parades and side events.

“We love to hear it,” Round-Up Vice President Nick Sirovatka said. “The Pendleton Round-Up is an institution, not just in Pendleton, but on our side of the state. It brings a lot of good opportunities to our communities. Having the governor coming out with an optimistic stance that we would be able to move forward and hold our events is always a good thing to hear.”

While the governor reiterated that the Round-Up would need to follow CDC guidelines when reopening, Sirovatka said the safety plan for 2021 is still a “living document” that is subject to change as the CDC makes changes to its own rules in the coming months.

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## Years of work reach fruition

East Improvement District dedicates \$50M East Project

By **BEN LONERGAN**  
*East Oregonian*

**UMATILLA** — More than six decades after regulators first documented groundwater declines in Umatilla and Morrow counties, the East Project irrigation system was dedicated along the Columbia River on Tuesday, May 11.

The more than \$50 million project aims to provide farmers with river water in lieu of pumping from the ground in an effort to recharge depleted aquifers and allow farmers to grow higher value crops.

“It wouldn’t be possible unless

there was a lot of people supporting it, and then the benefits are going to be broad,” said Carl St. Hilaire, president of JSH Farms in Hermiston. “Just as the support was broad, the benefits will be broad in terms of economic benefits for the entire community.”

St. Hilaire is the district chairman of the East Improvement District, the public entity created to build and operate the East Project. The district was created by 13 landowners and spans 26,500 irrigated acres.

“I think the main thing is it’s kind of a miracle that the stakeholders could get together and agree on promoting a project,” St. Hilaire said.

While the improvement district

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

East Improvement District chairman Carl St. Hilaire, left, and Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, cut a ribbon during the dedication of the East Project along the Columbia River on Tuesday, May 11, 2021.

