

# Workers:

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“Right now, the staff are tired,” said Brian Patrick, vice president of nursing at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston. “A lot of what’s weighing on them is that there’s an answer out there for the pandemic. But everything’s so politicized that the protection isn’t being taken advantage of. We continue to see a rise in patients coming through the emergency department every single day and I don’t expect that to lighten up at all.”

This makes life away from the hospital difficult for some health care workers. Some nurses say they are struggling with anxiety and burnout. And the political division, staff shortages and shifting policies and procedures has left them struggling to cope.

“I can’t have normal conversations with people not in health care and listen to their political ideology or health care thoughts without attaching a patient in a difficult situation to that,” St. Anthony nurse Judith Lindsey said, crying. “I don’t think that people realize that’s what’s happening when they talk to people that are seeing this day-to-day. It’s a bit emotional to me. And that takes a toll, for sure.”

When Maranville gets home from work, he has little to no energy. He takes off his scrubs and shoes in the garage and immediately heads for the shower before helping put the kids to bed.

“But that’s as much as I do,” he said. “My wife carries all the burden after my shift. If she knows I’ve had a long and busy shift, she’ll just let me shower and let me veg out and eat dinner.”

## COVID-19 hospitalizations, deaths spike

Over the past month, COVID-19 hospitalizations in Umatilla County surged to levels never seen before during the pandemic. As hospitals across the region filled to the brim, staff were left scrambling, often reaching out to more than a dozen different hospitals before finding an available bed for patients needing a higher



Judith Lindsey exits the room of a COVID-19 patient Thursday, Aug. 19, 2021, in the critical care unit at CHI St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

level of care.

Lindsey recalled one patient who couldn’t get a higher level of care because hospitals everywhere were full. They didn’t have the equipment nor expertise at the time to care for the patient, she said. That patient didn’t make it.

“That was a very sad moment for me, and for all my coworkers, because we were just doing the best that we could,” she said. “We knew it wasn’t enough. It’s an indescribable feeling as a health care provider.”

During the past week, Umatilla County has reported nine COVID-19 deaths. That’s the most the county has reported in a single week since the pandemic began. They died in nursing homes, hospitals and in their homes. One victim was just 29 years old.

More than 70 people have been hospitalized with COVID-19 at St. Anthony and Good Shepherd since the beginning of August, according to hospital spokespeople. But for some workers, those data points do little to encapsulate the feeling of caring for patients for weeks on end.

Galen Thompson, a nurse in St. Anthony’s critical care unit, said the most difficult moments come while caring for couples and family members at the same time. She recalled early in the pandemic when an elderly couple was hospitalized with COVID-19. Only one of them survived.

“That was sad,” she said.

“That was difficult.”

At times, Thompson has had to tell family members of COVID-19 patients that they can’t see their loved ones. Health care workers can put the patients on Face-time, “but that’s just not the same,” she said.

## Misinformation runs rampant

In addition to what’s faced in pandemic hospitals, Thompson pointed to a stressor that several health care workers say has made their jobs even more draining — social media.

Misinformation and skepticism over the seriousness of the pandemic has left some health care workers feeling unappreciated by a community that scoffs at masks and distancing and doubts vaccinations. And that skepticism also stretches to some health care workers, too. Multiple health care workers said their coworkers are reluctant to get vaccinated.

“I try not to even look at the stuff, because it is so maddening to know what’s going on and to hear people say it’s not real or it’s being overplayed by the media,” Maranville said.

Some patients don’t even believe they have COVID-19, despite their test results and their symptoms, multiple health care workers say.

“I’m hoping that some of these patients that decided not to get vaccinated and got ill can share their stories with other people,” Lindsey said. “That could be something that positively impacts other people’s choices.”

Hospitalizations during the past week have lulled slightly, but with large summer events bringing people together en masse, health care workers said they are waiting anxiously for cases to ramp up again.

“As the number drops, we’re wondering when the next wave is going to hit us,” Patrick said.

That makes it even more essential for people to get vaccinated, health care workers say. Lindsey said she encourages unvaccinated COVID-positive patients to share their stories, hoping they might change a few minds.

“Our masks and our vaccines aren’t all for us,” Lindsey said. “They’re for our community. It’s community health. So much of what we’re asking our community to do is not for the individual; it’s for everyone.”

Lindsey retains one memory she considers emblematic of the health care workers’ experience through the latest surge.

On a recent night, the emergency room was slammed with COVID-19 patients, many of whom were not doing well. Only a skeleton crew was working, Lindsey said, but “everybody in the entire hospital — no matter their politics, no matter their ideas about the vaccine” worked together to take care of everybody.

“It’s kind of a silver lining to me that there’s a lot of divisiveness going around right now,” she said, “but when it’s needed, people come together.”

# County reports two more deaths from COVID-19

Nine COVID-19 deaths hit Umatilla County during the past week

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Oregon Health Authority reported two more Umatilla County COVID-19 deaths Monday, Aug. 23, raising the county’s death toll to 108 since the pandemic began.

The disclosure comes as the county reported 69 new COVID-19 cases, a slight decline from the

record-breaking surge seen in previous weeks.

The first victim is a 54-year-old man who tested positive Aug. 14 and died Aug. 17 at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston. He had unspecified underlying health conditions.

The second victim is a 66-year-old man who tested positive July 19 and died Aug. 13. The state has yet to determine where he died. He had unspecified underlying health conditions.

The county has reported nine COVID-19 deaths during the past week, a new pandemic record.

# App shows your risk of COVID-19 exposure

Feds approve Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine

By ALEX WITTEWER  
The Observer

infected with COVID-19.

LA GRANDE — Residents in Umatilla County in a group of 50 have a 57% chance of meeting someone with COVID-19, while in Morrow County there is a 73% chance.

That’s according to the application 19 and Me, developed by a team of engineers and data experts at Mathematica, the app uses analytics from multiple mathematical tools to track regional data across the United States. App users can input their ZIP code, age and behavioral habits, such as indoor dining and sports watching, and find out their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

For Eastern Oregon, the numbers vary. Grant County scored the lowest risk out of all Eastern Oregon counties: 1 in every 924 residents were infected with the virus, according to the web tool (which accounts for unreported cases of infection). The app pegged Morrow County with having the highest risk, where 1 in every 39 residents are

The chance of at least one person in 50 having COVID-19 in Morrow County is 54%, according to the app, and in Baker County the risk is 64%. But in Grant County, the app reported the risk was down to 5.3%.

The tool also calculates an abstract risk assessment number that scores the severity of exposure and susceptibility to infection. Unvaccinated individuals who don’t use a mask or follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention handwashing guidelines have a higher number than those who are vaccinated and follow guidelines for hand washing and mask use.

Vaccinations remain a safe and effective way at reducing the risk of hospitalization and symptoms of the virus, according to local, state and national experts. In addition, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for COVID-19 on Monday, Aug. 23, making it the first vaccine for COVID-19 to move past emergency use status.

# Fair:

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“We enjoy getting to see friends and having family around,” Lentz said.

Erin Heideman, the Morrow County 4-H coordinator and a part of Oregon State University’s extension office, agreed the community aspect was one of the best parts of having the fair back this year. Between emceeing the youth livestock show and answering questions, Heideman’s passion for the future of agriculture is obvious.

“At the end of the day, it’s all about how do we support our youth and how do we promote agricultural education. This is how we do it,” she said. “Our hope is that as these young people grow and develop that they’ve been under the tutelage of some pretty amazing adults that then become the next generation of producers.”

She said while numbers in 4-H and FFA dropped a bit because of COVID-19 in 2020, it has seen a large increase in renewed interest lately.

“I think it’s it’s the value of the work ethic,” she said, “the camaraderie amongst parents and community and the opportunity to really teach our kids where their food and fiber comes from.”

Beth Dickenson, the county’s FFA advisor and one of Heideman’s friends from their time at OSU, spoke about how it’s more important than ever to get children involved in agriculture.

“The more time that goes on, the less connection that more and more people have,” Dickenson said. “And so then this becomes a novelty and a misunderstood industry. You want to eat and you want clothes, and you want lumber to build your home or your remodel, but you don’t know where it comes from. And then you pass legislation and vote for legislation and it goes against all the things that you want.”

“We are all in this together,” Heideman said. “We all make



Spectators watch local youths show their goats Friday, Aug. 20, 2021, at the Morrow County Fair in Heppner.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

sure kids are doing well. We are concerned about their safety and well-being. We want them to be extremely competitive but ultimately our job is to raise the next generation of Morrow County citizens. That’s our job.”

Heideman said there’s a ton of work that goes into events such as the Morrow County Fair, 4-H and FFA programs and it wouldn’t be possible without the copious number of volunteers.

“We have some amazing volunteers who are helping these kids be successful in their arena,” she said, “and it’s a real team effort.”

Many of the volunteers are kids as well — some who showed started working in the barn as early as 5:30 a.m. and stayed until after 6 p.m. to clean up and place fresh hay down after the competitions were finished.

“It’s hard,” she said. “It’s really

hard and it’s not always roses. This (the showmanship) is the roses part of it.”

But livestock wasn’t the only part of the Morrow County Fair this week. With a rodeo, rides, mouth-watering food and musical performances, attendees had a multitude of options to spend their day. For those lucky enough to be at the fair around 5 p.m., they had the opportunity to listen to 9-year-old Sarrafina James play hits from Metallica to Flamenco on her ukulele.

According to Justin James, her dad, she had just auditioned for “America’s Got Talent” before COVID-19 struck and forced everyone indoors. Putting in two to three hours of practice a day for the last year and a half, she was able to pick up the instrument quickly and perform alongside her dad’s hypnotist and comedy shows.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Haden Cimmiyotti, 10, of Heppner, hangs on to a mechanical bull Saturday, Aug. 10, 2021, at the Morrow County Fair in Heppner.

He said people have loved seeing Sarrafina play songs that challenge even grown adults, and she’s loved

the crowd so far. “It’s been an absolutely amazing fair,” he said.