

## County sets record for COVID-19 deaths

4 deaths raise this month's toll to 14; county expects that to increase this week

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Umatilla County reported four new COVID-19 deaths Wednesday, Aug. 25, setting a new pandemic record for deaths reported in a single day.

The grim disclosure raises this month's death toll to 14.

The last time the county reported as many COVID-19 deaths in a single month was in January, when a COVID-19 outbreak rocked Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla. The county in July 2020 reported the most deaths from COVID-19 in a month, with 21.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said health officials expect to report more COVID-19 deaths later this week.

In all, 112 Umatilla County residents who have tested for COVID-19 have died since the pandemic started in March 2020, according to county data.

The newly disclosed deaths come as the county reported 69 new COVID-19 cases on Aug. 25. Fiumara said some cases are being traced back to the Umatilla County Fair, which ran Aug. 11-14. He said the health department fully expects to report more cases connected to the fair, but the county has yet to determine whether there was an outbreak.

The county has averaged at least 55 new COVID-19 cases per day during the past week, showing a slight decline from the record-breaking surge in previous week. Last week marked the fourth consecutive week where the county reported at least 400 cases, also a pandemic record.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A sign Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021, near Butte Park in Hermiston advertises the Greater Hermiston CityFest, which is Aug. 28, the day after Gov. Kate Brown's mask mandate for large outdoor gatherings goes into effect once more.

## LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS HEED MASK MANDATE

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

UMATILLA COUNTY — With COVID-19 cases continuing to surge in Eastern Oregon and around the state, Gov. Kate Brown expanded the mask mandate to include outdoor events where social distancing isn't possible.

The new rule goes into effect Friday, Aug. 27.

With the region still in the midst of its summer events season, the mandate will affect several large events in the weeks ahead, including the Pendleton Round-Up. Umatilla County Public Health director Joe Fiumara said masks were a good tool in slowing the spread of the virus in crowds and was preferable to the shutdowns or cancellations.

"One of my fears is that more steps will be taken, and it won't be economically neutral," he said.

For its part, the Pendleton Round-Up Association is planning to comply with the new mandate.

"We are excited about the 11th Pendleton Round-Up and the prospect of the economic impact it will bring to the community, county and region," Round-Up publicity director Pat Reay said in a statement. "We intend to follow all county and state guidelines at the event as they continue to evolve."

In a typical year, the Round-Up not only draws thou-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Rodeo fans fill the stands Sept. 11, 2019, at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds for the opening day of the 2019 Round-Up. Gov. Kate Brown announced a mask requirement for outdoor events, such as the Round-Up, to begin Friday, Aug. 27, 2021.

sands of rodeo fans from across the Northwest and beyond, but also a legion of volunteers, vendors, contractors and other assorted visitors. Fiumara said officials from public health and Round-Up have been meeting monthly to discuss the Round-Up's health plan and likely will meet a few more times ahead of the rodeo, which commences the second full week of September. Fiumara said holding the Round-Up still presents concerns over the potential spread of COVID-19, but government officials will need to weigh the lives it puts at risk versus the

effect any kind of curtailment will have on the community's mental and economic health.

Fiumara said vaccines still are the most effective way of halting the spread of the virus and the public health department will try to use the Round-Up to its advantage. Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock in a weekly update of COVID-19 data reported 1,217 vaccinations

occurred in the county in the third week of August, an increase from the week before, when there was 1,021.

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## Environmentalists decry proposed Boardman dairy

Opponents say dairy will worsen drought, other environmental problems plaguing the region

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

BOARDMAN — A coalition of environmental groups is calling on Gov. Kate Brown to reject a permit application for the proposed Easterday dairy in Boardman.

In a press conference Tuesday, Aug. 24, leaders from the Stand Up for Factory Farms Coalition said the dairy will exacerbate a variety of envi-

ronmental problems already plaguing the region and hasten climate change.

"These problems are likely to worsen if the state issues a permit for this mega-dairy," said Mackenzie Aime, the Oregon organizer with Food and Water Watch and Food and Water Action. "All mega-dairies pose a threat to Oregon's public health and environment."

The groups submitted a petition with more than 1,400 signatures to Brown on Aug. 24, demanding the governor direct state agencies to deny a confined animal feeding operation permit, or CAFO, that Cole Easterday seeks.



EO Media Group, File

The former Lost Valley Farm outside Boardman, which Cole Easterday proposes to reopen. A coalition of environmental groups is pushing for Gov. Kate Brown to deny Easterday's permit, claiming the massive dairy will increase a slew of environmental problems in the region.

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