

COVID-19 wave has crested, but recovery unlikely before holiday season

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon's record wave of COVID-19 cases appears to have crested, but the long recovery will likely stretch into the winter holiday season.

"I'm happy to deliver some promising news — daily cases and hospitalizations are slowly coming down from record highs," said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state epidemiologist, during a Thursday, Sept. 16, press call.

New infections and deaths also remain high but are trending down the past two weeks after eight weeks of rising numbers driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

But it will take as long to get down from the crest as it took to get there, about two months, according to state forecasts.

"The delta variant remains a formidable threat," Sidelinger said.

With more than 1,000 COVID-19 patients statewide — nearly all unvaccinated — hospitals are reeling and medical attention is delayed to not just virus patients, but heart attack victims, those injured in car crashes and other life-threatening incidents.

"These capacity levels are



EO Media Group, File

Emergency room personnel hustle to care for patients at St. Charles Medical Center Bend in August 2021.

not sustainable. Our health system remains under significant stress," Sidelinger said.

The Oregon Health Authority on Sept. 16 reported 46 new COVID-19 related deaths in the state, raising the overall death toll during the crisis to 3,536. Despite the recent sharp rise in cases, Oregon's overall per capita death rate ranks 46th among the 50 states. The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center reported that as of Sept. 16 the pandemic has killed 4.66

million people worldwide, including 667,894 in the United States.

COVID-19 trend forecasts from Oregon Health & Science University last month held out the possibility that after dropping through September and October, COVID-19 levels could fall to levels not seen since the very beginning of the pandemic. But the latest forecasts show a later and slower decline. Hospitalizations are projected to be below 200 per day by

Thanksgiving. Oregon residents should hope for the best, but prepare for the virus to once again impede holiday cheer.

"We're not fortune tellers," Sidelinger said. "We will probably all be considering celebrating differently. We may shiver a bit out in the cold."

The rebound could slow or stall amid challenges from several factors, including Labor Day holiday weekend socializing, K-12 schools reopening to in-class

instruction, the return of college students, and major events such as the Pendleton Round-Up and college football games.

"Every opportunity that brings people together is an opportunity for the disease to spread," Sidelinger said.

The severity of the flu season and the level of wet and cold weather that may cause people to congregate indoors more could also contribute to infection levels.

All are occurring as the state experiences its high-

est infection rates of the entire crisis, which is now into its 19th month since the first case in Oregon was reported at the end of February 2020.

Sidelinger's press call came just after the announcement that Reynolds High School in the Portland suburb of Troutdale, the state's second largest high school, would close for a week because of likely COVID-19 exposure.

Setbacks to in-class instruction were expected, Sidelinger said. He noted the Oct. 18 deadline for school staff to be fully vaccinated. Anyone — teachers, staff, parents, students — who believes they were exposed to COVID-19 needs to isolate and not come to school.

"They are not drivers of infection," Sidelinger said of schools. "The drivers of infection is the community."

Following masking and social distance protocols and encouraging anyone who has not been vaccinated to get their shots was the best counterattack.

Those who remain unvaccinated, go unmasked and gather in groups are being selfish because their decisions put others at risk, Sidelinger said.

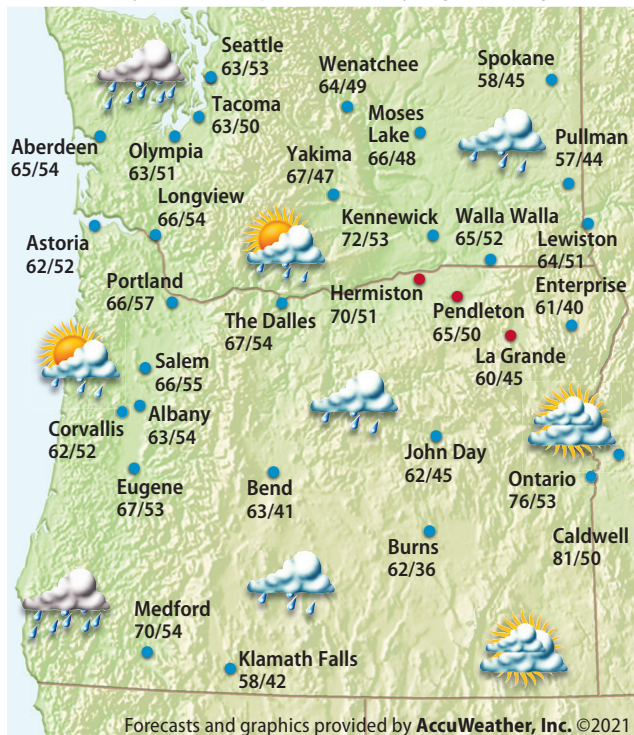
"Come together as a community," he urged. "Vaccinations work, masks work."

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Clearing and showers around	Mostly cloudy, showers; cool	Mostly sunny and cool	Warmer with sunshine	Partly sunny, breezy and nice
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
65° 50°	65° 47°	65° 45°	79° 50°	74° 49°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
70° 51°	69° 52°	70° 45°	79° 47°	77° 51°

OREGON FORECAST

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



ALMANAC

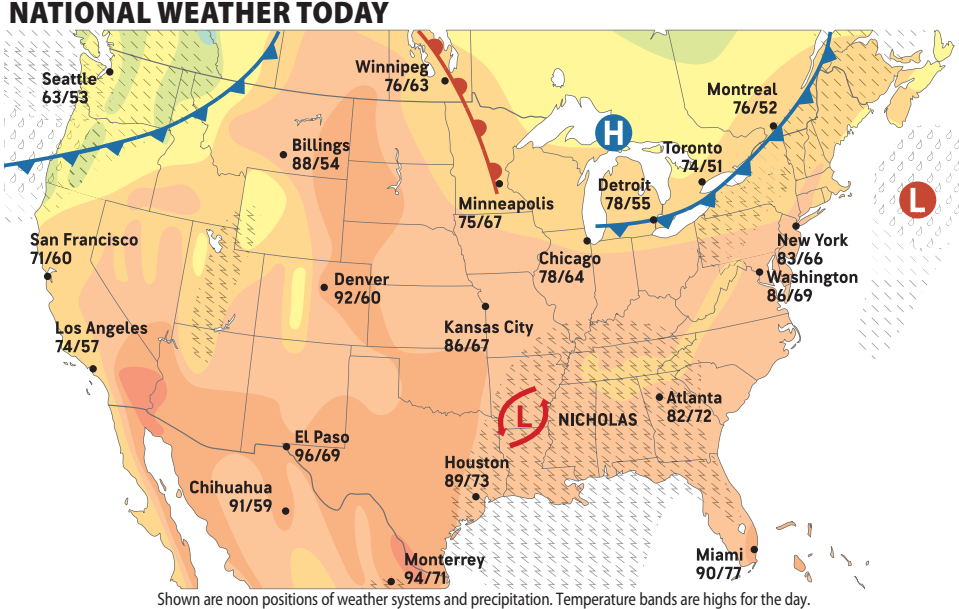
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	73°	39°
Normals	79°	50°
Records	97° (1938)	30° (1965)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.09"	
Normal month to date	0.28"	
Year to date	4.46"	
Last year to date	8.68"	
Normal year to date	8.93"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	77°	41°
Normals	81°	48°
Records	97° (1938)	27° (1965)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.04"	
Normal month to date	0.17"	
Year to date	1.97"	
Last year to date	1.66"	
Normal year to date	5.48"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Sun.	
Boardman	SSW 7-14	WSW 8-16
Pendleton	SW 7-14	WSW 8-16
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:37 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	7:00 p.m.	
Moonrise today	6:34 p.m.	
Moonset today	3:39 a.m.	
Full	Last	New
Sep 20	Sep 28	Oct 6
First		Oct 12

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 103° in El Centro, Calif. Low 16° in Stanley, Idaho

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s	-0s	0s	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	90s	100s	110s
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showers t-storms rain flurries snow ice cold front warm front stationary front high low

Baker City man sentenced to federal prison for theft of COVID-19 funds

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A Baker City man who pleaded guilty in June to misappropriating COVID-19 relief funds was sentenced Thursday, Sept. 16, to 10 months in federal prison.

Jeremy Michael Clawson, 32, pleaded guilty on June 8 to one count of theft of public money. As part of the plea agreement, Clawson also agreed to pay \$125,200 in restitution to the U.S. Treasury.

Prosecutors and Clawson's attorney agreed to a two-year prison term but recommended U.S. District Court Chief Judge Marco A. Hernandez reduce that to 10 months because he is serving a 19-month sentence at the Snake River Correctional Institution, Ontario.

The state time came after Clawson pleaded guilty on Sept. 29, 2020, in Baker County Circuit Court to attempting to elude a police officer and driving under the influence of intoxicants the month before.

Baker City police officer Justin Prevo arrested Claw-

son at 11:45 p.m. on Aug. 21, 2020, according to court records. Clawson was driving the 2016 Dodge Challenger he bought with part of the federal COVID-19 loan and failed to stop and drove south, running through two stop signs.

Clawson's arrest happened 10 days after he deposited \$145,200 from a federal loan into an Umpqua Bank account he and his girlfriend opened.

He received the Economic Injury Disaster Loan through the Small Business Administration, according to U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams. That was one of the financial aid programs in the CARES Act that Congress passed in late March 2020.

According to court documents, shortly after depositing the \$145,200, Clawson made large cash withdrawals at the drive-thru window of the Umpqua Bank branch in Baker City. On Aug. 17, 2020, he received a \$49,905 cashier's check from the bank to buy the Dodge Challenger.

Umpqua Bank investigators noted the unusual activity on Clawson's account and reported it to the SBA.

Federal agents seized the

Dodge and approximately \$50,000 in cash from the fraudulent loan pursuant to federal warrants and voluntary abandonment of funds in third parties' possession.

SBA loan documents showed the loan was made to benefit Halperin Manufacturing Company in San Diego, California. There is no record of any such company, but the loan application listed the company's owner and claimed it employed 350 people. Investigators contacted the person listed as the owner, but that person denied owning or being affiliated with any such company.

That person also told investigators the address in San Diego was their personal residence and not a commercial property with 350 employees.

In early September 2020, investigators from the SBA and the U.S. Secret Service learned about Clawson's arrest near Baker City while driving the Dodge.

Clawson later told authorities he had received a large inheritance from his father, including \$30,000 in cash he had on his person during a subsequent arrest.

IN BRIEF

Wallowa County has four new COVID-19 deaths

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority on Thursday, Sept. 16, reported four new COVID-19 deaths in Wallowa County, bringing the total during the pandemic to 10. Three of the deaths were from cases during the most recent surge of the virus, which started in July, and a fourth was from earlier in the year.

The earliest of the four was of a 79-year-old woman who tested positive on April 28 and died May 11. The woman, who had underlying conditions, died at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Lewiston, Idaho, the OHA update said.

The other three deaths came within a week of each other. First was a 69-year-old man

who died on Aug. 20, six days after testing positive for COVID-19. It's not yet known if he had underlying conditions.

A day later, on Aug. 21, an 84-year-old man died, also six days after testing positive for the virus. The man had underlying conditions.

Four days later, on Aug. 25, a 56-year-old woman tested positive and died the same day. It's unknown yet if she had underlying conditions.

The three August deaths are the first reported by OHA during a spike in cases that has seen roughly 290 people in the county contract the virus in the past two months.

On Sept. 15, the OHA reported three new cases of COVID-19, which brings the county total to 489.

—EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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