

Blood:

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Health Care System, Hermiston.

“Community support of American Red Cross blood drives is essential to return our blood supply to pre-COVID minimum stocking numbers,” she said. “We especially need O-negative donors. This is one way you can serve your community and help ensure a stable blood supply for local hospitals.”

It is unclear to what degree the pandemic has affected the amount of blood donations. Some areas, such as La Grande and Baker City, have experienced an uptick in donations this year in comparison to other areas in the region. Still, the American Red Cross noted that nationwide blood donations have gone down 10% since the beginning of the pandemic.

“We have experienced critical blood supply issues in the past months. We have had no units of O-negative on the shelf two times and zero O-positive one time,” said Ronda Reisdorph, a laboratory manager at Hermiston’s Good Shepherd Medical Center. “We have been running with less than minimum thresholds in the past few months and no chance for restocking even with emergent cases.”

While the medical center expects to receive an increased supply over the coming weeks to supplement its stockpile due, there’s no indication that the national blood shortage will improve in the near future.

The American Red Cross supplies approximately 40% of the nation’s blood supply, according to the organization, and some hospitals might receive as little as 25% of their requested blood supplies in the coming weeks. Hospitals normally keep a steady supply of blood for routine procedures but can request more in the event of a mass casualty or injury event.

Since much of the blood that arrives in hospitals comes from the arms of local community members, due to the large turnout for Union County blood drives, some local hospitals have fared better in the national crisis.

Mardi Ford, director of communications at



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Jake Yoste, a phlebotomy technician with the American Red Cross, explains the blood donation process to Elena Nightingale at the community blood drive Jan. 25, 2022, at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in La Grande. The Red Cross reports its blood supply is the lowest in more than a decade.

Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, credited the work of husband and wife duo Linda and Sheldon Strand, who run La Grande’s American Red Cross blood drives, as a key factor in ensuring Grande Ronde Hospital has an adequate blood supply. Ford said the hospital works closely with the American Red Cross and has an internal system that is used to track blood supply levels.

Ford said the hospital has only had a couple of instances in the past few years where blood supplies reached critical levels.

“We are proactive in making sure that we have what we need to serve our patients,” she said. “That’s one of the beauties of being small and independent. We have options on how we’re able to do things.”

Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, recently received shipments where the requested blood supply was not provided.

“Fortunately, we work with the Red Cross on a blood rotation to keep us at optimal levels and have held on to a supply of the shorted products,” said Brooke Pace, director of communications and public relations. “We do this to ensure that nothing is wasted because of outdated. We can still transfer units to regional hospitals in our area if dating becomes a concern.”

Stefanie Davidson, Wallowa Memorial Hospital’s lab director, urged residents to donate blood amid

the growing national shortage, even as local supplies remain steady.

“Even though we still have an above critical supply, the national shortage is a concern, and we would like to encourage anyone who can to get out and donate,” she said.

Pendleton’s CHI St. Anthony Hospital fared better than other hospitals in the region, according to the hospital’s president, Harold Geller, who noted the hospital was well stocked.

“There is always a concern, pandemic or not,” he said. “We here at St. Anthony have taken steps to be prepared as best as possible.”

Even still, the hospital president did not mince words about the national shortage.

“Please donate blood,” he said. “Now.”

Changing the rules

The blood crisis also has renewed an effort by lawmakers to change the rules regarding donations by those in the LGBT community.

Senators from across the nation signed a letter on Jan. 14 urging the Food and Drug Administration to change the rules to allow men in same-sex relationships to donate blood. In total, 22 senators signed their names to the letter, including Democratic Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

“In light of the nation’s

urgent blood supply crisis and to ensure that Americans have access to life-saving blood transfusions during the pandemic, we urge you to swiftly update your current blood donor deferral policies in favor of ones that are grounded in science, based on individualized risk factors, and allow all potentially eligible donors to do so free of stigma,” the senators wrote Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock.

In 1983, the federal government placed a lifetime ban on gay men from donating blood, at the height of the HIV/AIDS scares of the 1980s. Those rules were relaxed in 2015 by requiring one year of abstinence, and then reduced further to three months in 2020.

The letter noted that advances in testing technologies would allow for gay and bisexual men to safely donate blood, and criticized the time-based guidelines that perpetuates stereotypes.

“It is critical that all patients have access to the health care services they need during this pandemic, and for many, the availability of blood and blood products is a necessary component of care,” the letter said. “Unfortunately, a significant drop in the number of donations during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a serious shortage of available blood.”

restaurants, not to mention the stipends to community groups.

But he also sees it as a chance to showcase John Day to people from all over the state and beyond.

“Some of them could be potential residents and business owners, people who would say, ‘Hey, I like this place — I want to stay,’ he said. “They bring a lot of folks to the area, and I think it’s important for us to be good hosts and show them a good time.”

School:

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ing declining enrollment, deferred facility maintenance, high school athletic reclassification and salary issues with classified staff. The administrators and board members at the meeting argued the challenges implied the district’s situation was much more dire than it was.

“I feel like it’s painting a financial crisis picture with those things,” said Matt Yoshioka, the district’s director of curriculum instruction and assessment. “Maybe it could be worded differently. Because we’re not in a financial crisis as a district. We’re in a good spot.”

Administrators took issue with the material on salary issues for classified staff and noncertified staff, such as educational assistants, custodians and front office personnel. When factoring in classified employees’ benefits package, the administrators said the district’s financial offerings were competitive with other jobs in the community.

“That just seems like somebody was grumpy about their paycheck,” Yoshioka said.

He added the district was able to fill all of its vacant teaching positions last year, an accomplishment many other districts couldn’t meet, but admitted that classified positions were more of a “revolving door.”

Hernandez said many of the challenges they listed were drawn from comments from multiple sources. While he wanted the district to be open

about its challenges, he would defer to the board on what it wanted to include in the superintendent recruitment materials. The board changed the language on employee salary to more generalized material on employee recruitment, hiring and retention.

Using board and administrator input, Jordan and Hernandez added, dropped and revised the brochure and list of challenges. Among the new additions was some language about improving relationships with Pendleton’s Latino community, a growing segment of the district’s student body.

Hernandez thanked board members for their input, adding that whatever challenges Pendleton was facing, they weren’t as bad as many other districts in the Northwest.

“You take a look at the challenges, they’re not so overwhelming as they are in some districts right now,” he said. “In some of the districts Bill and I are helping — trust with the community and disarray and the board and so on — we don’t sense that here.”

The school board needs to fill the district’s chief executive role after Superintendent Chris Fritsch announced in November he intended to retire at the end of June. Superintendent applications are due March 4 with the board expecting to hold preliminary interviews at the end of the month. After finalists are interviewed April 4-6, the board anticipates announcing its selection on April 7.

If everything goes according to plan, the next superintendent will start July 1.

Masks:

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Oregonians who have died.

OHA officials say the indoor mask mandate could lift sooner if hospitalizations decline at a faster rate than expected. Officials also recommend high-risk individuals continue wearing masks indoors, including people who haven’t been vaccinated and those with compromised immunities.

OHA’s announcement soon puts masking rules back into the hands of businesses or employers.

More than 100 people testified during a recent public hearing on the indoor mask rule, with several folks asking the state to drop the indoor mask requirement immediately.

A hearing on the mask requirement in schools last month yielded a similar response, but the Oregon Health Authority made its school mask requirement permanent as the temporary rule expired.

With the announcement, that rule now has an end date: March 31.

The next eight weeks will give “school districts time to prepare,” OHA officials said. There also may be new guidance from the Oregon Department of Education to keep schools operating as mask rules change.

Sidelinger said state officials will continue to promote universal masking as part of the mitigation efforts that have kept schools open, which reflects current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Like the general indoor mask mandate, Sidelinger said the mask requirement for K-12 settings may be lifted sooner than March 31 depending on COVID-19 conditions.

“By having a date several weeks out in the future, this will give our local education partners a chance to prepare, if they want to implement requirements of their own at the community level based on conditions that they see, to make other changes that they may need to make to be able to track individuals who are exposed or out sick, and other things that right now depend on universal masks in schools,” he said.

Saddle:

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ally works out to around \$150,000.

When possible, Cycle Oregon also makes an effort to hire local service providers and entertainers.

“We’re trying to utilize as much as possible from the communities without overburdening them,” Schulz said.

Altogether, he estimated, the total economic impact

from the Classic would be in the range of \$400,000-\$450,000.

Getting ready, Mayor Ron Lundbom said that event was a boon for John Day and he expects this year’s ride will be as well.


“If it’s half as big as the last time they were here, it’s going to be great,” he said.

Local officials have been in touch with Cycle Oregon about the 2022 Classic since last fall but were asked to keep the discussions under wraps until this year’s ride

was officially announced.

A lot of details still have to be worked out, including where the group will pitch its tents on the first night of the event. John Day City Manager Nick Green said he suggested the Hill Family Park, the Grant County Fairgrounds and the Seventh Street Sports Complex as possible campsites.

Green predicted the event will be an economic windfall for the city, with Cycle Oregon participants shopping in local stores and eating in local



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