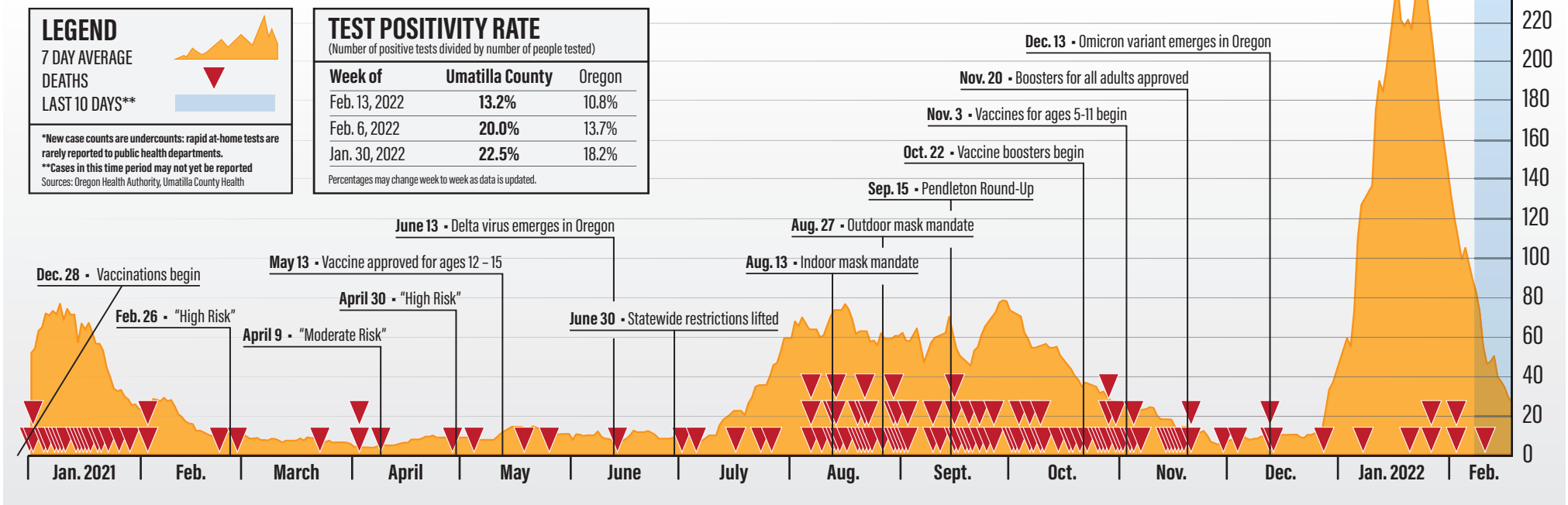


UMATILLA COUNTY COVID-19 TREND - AS OF FEB. 18, 2022

Umatilla County cases: 22,078* | Umatilla County deaths: 199 | Oregon cases: 684,441* | Oregon deaths: 6,444



Umatilla County COVID-19 case counts continue to drop rapidly, mirroring the statewide trend. The test positivity rate, while still high, has come down significantly.

District prepares for end of mask mandate

1 out of 5 students, teachers plan to keep masking up after end of March

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Oregon's mask mandate for K-12 schools is expiring no later than the end of March, and the Pendleton School District likely will follow suit.

As a part of discussion on the future of the district's COVID-19 policy at a Monday, Feb. 16, Pendleton School Board meeting, Superintendent Chris Fritsch shared results from a survey asking parents and staff about the expiring mandate.

With the survey garnering responses from 939 parents (representing 1,359 students) and 275 staff members, Fritsch noted the survey had an unusually high response rate.

According to the survey, only 6% of parents would stop sending their children to in-person school if the district lifted the mandate. And once masks are no longer required on campus, slightly less than 1 in 5 parents said they still would send their students to school with face coverings. Staff also were asked if they would continue to wear masks once the mandate ends, and a similar amount — a little less than 1 in 5 — answered affirmatively.

Classroom teachers got an extra question on whether they had the resources to



Masked students walk to their classes on Feb. 22, 2021, the first day of in-person instruction at Washington Elementary School in Pendleton. Oregon's mandate on wearing masks indoors ends by March 31, 2022, but schools still will have to follow some preventative measures.

conduct online classes, with 70% saying they did. The remaining teachers said they needed some additional technology, such as laptops for

the students. Even with the mask mandate expected to expire, the district will be required to comply with some preven-

tative measures. The responsibility of contact tracing will be moved to schools and whether a person will have to quarantine after being exposed to COVID-19 will rely on several factors, including the staff or student's vaccination status and natural immunity. However, schools will not track compliance for students who are opting to wear masks.

"The rules are such that quarantine will be confusing and be determined by variables from case to case which could add more frustration amongst parents and students," the survey results report states.

Board member Mason Murphy said the district needs to prepare for the community to live with COVID-19 indefinitely and

he would be in favor of staff getting ready for a mask-optional policy so they can clarify its details.

While a small segment of parents are planning to keep their students home once the mask mandate lifts, Matt Yoshioka, the district's director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, said he anticipates that number continues to shrink as time goes on.

"I'm still confident that as we're able to show that things are safe and things are functioning that more and more of those students will come back and be present," he said.

Fritsch said the board didn't need to make a decision that night and he could return to members during one of the board's march meetings with a more definitive recommendation and policy.

M-F decides on Parks & Recreation tax

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — Milton-Freewater voters soon will decide whether to renew an expiring Parks & Recreation tax.

The Milton-Freewater City Council on Monday, Feb. 14, approved calling for replacement of a five-year property tax option of \$100,000 to maintain and improve the town's parks and related facilities.

The current tax expires this fall.

If passed in the May 17 election, the new tax would cost property owners 32 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, replacing the present 37 cents per \$1,000, City Manager Linda Hall told the council.

The new rate is thanks to the value of homes in the area rising, Hall said.

When the first \$100,000 was approved by voters in May 2018, it was intended to repair and upgrade the Joe Humbert Family Aquatic Center, Yantis Park's playground equipment



City crews scrubbed surfaces of the Milton-Freewater public pool in 2019 to remove a failed coating product.

and walking trails, the city's golf course cart paths, tennis court and ball fields. The vast majority of that \$100,000, however, was used on the aquatic center, Hall said.

Planned changes included refreshing the facility's exterior with paint and adding new signage, plus applying a new rubber coating to the swimming pool's walls.

In 2019, however, the center closed at the end of July as that coating failed, clouding the

water over and over, impeding the view of lifeguards watching swimmers.

The year 2020 brought the COVID-19 pandemic, health restrictions placed on public gatherings and continuing issues with the replacement coating. Smoke from regional wildfires kept people inside; the pool closed for the year after about three weeks of operation.

Aquatic facility experts eventually found the pool

surface and much of its equipment had reached life expectancy and continuing to coat the plaster did not make sense.

It was eventually learned the city's long protocol of emptying the pool after each season had caused stress to the structure. By April, the council had approved a repair contract of \$172,694 with Anderson Perry & Associates engineering services to fix all the pool's issues.

In July 2021, the council and city officials presented potential pool heating options at a public meeting to gauge how the community wanted to see money left from the 2018 tax measure spent, Hall said. After the installation of four heat pumps and the purchase of a solar thermal cover for the pool in winter, she said there is about \$62,000 left.

Council President Steve Irving said authorizing the ballot measure must be approved to move forward on projects to improve the pool. The ensuing vote to do so was unanimous, with Councilor Brad Humbert absent.

Council candidate field grows, still no competitive races

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — There now is a candidate for every seat up for election on the Pendleton City Council, but voters won't have much of a choice in the May 17 elections if no other candidates join the field.

Addison Schulberg filed for one of Pendleton's two at-large seats on Feb. 10, becoming the first candidate to run to succeed retiring incumbent Jake Cambier. Schulberg is a manager at Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., the downtown restaurant his parents have owned and operated since 1980.

Councilor Steve Campbell filed to run for the other at-large seat on Feb. 9. Following the resignation of former Councilor Paul Chalmers shortly after he won reelection in 2020,

the city council selected Campbell, a vice president and senior commercial relationships manager at Banner Bank, from a nine-person pool of candidates. Because of the timing of Chalmers' resignation, Campbell is running to complete the final two years of Chalmers' original term and would need to run again in 2024 for a full four-year term.

The other incumbents — Ward 1 Councilor Carole Innes, Ward 2 Councilor McKennon McDonald and Ward 3 Councilor Linda Neuman — all filed for reelection. But no race has attracted a second candidate yet, meaning all the candidates running would be all but assured new terms if the field doesn't grow.

The filing deadline for the May 17 elections is March 8.

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