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Community update

The Warm Springs Health and Wellness Center on Tuesday of this week reported 23 new cases of Covid-19 in the community. This was out of 119 tests conducted.

The number added to the number of positive cases—99 at time—in the community on late Monday. This was down from an earlier spike that saw more than 140 positive cases, which in part prompted the current tribal and Academy shutdowns.

By Tuesday of this week, 42 close contacts were receiving daily monitoring. There were six positive tests reported from outside facilities among Warm Springs tribal members.

With the tribes, other communities across the U.S. and world are also experiencing the current post-holiday, Omicron wave of covid. One positive note is that the vaccinations—the initial doses plus the booster—are effective in preventing serious covid illness, hospitalization and death.

Vaccinations

Vaccines are saving lives, and they are keeping people out of the hospital, said Hyllis Dauphinais, Clinic chief executive officer. Vaccinations are the primary way to bring the Covid-19 pandemic under control.

You can call the Warm Springs Health and Wellness Center during business hours to schedule an appointment for your initial dose, your booster, or to arrange a vaccination for your child.

The number to call is 541-553-2131.

Health professionals are now recommending the booster dose for people ages 12 and over.

Testing update

The Warm Springs Clinic Health and Wellness Center has conducted a total of 18,126 covid tests since testing became available in 2020.

Over that time, a total of 1,333 have returned positive among community members. An additional 179 positive tests have come from outside facilities. Combined, that is a total of 1,512 positive covid cases among the tribal community since the pandemic began.

As of earlier this week, two tribal members were hospitalized with Covid-19.

Precautions

Please continue to follow the tribal Covid-19 protocol: Take precautions by wearing a face mask and maintaining distance from others, and please get vaccinated. And during the current wave, the booster is more important than ever. Some of the specific protocol provisions on the reservation:

- Wear a face mask in public places.
- Maintain social distance from other people.
- If you have covid symptoms, please stay home.

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have Covid-19:

- Fever or chills, and cough. Loss of sense of taste or smell.
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Fatigue, muscle and body aches.
- Headache and sore throat. Congestion or runny nose. Nausea or vomiting, etc.

Tribes, Academy on temporary shutdown

An early January spike in Covid-19 cases in the tribal community has prompted a temporary shut-down of the tribal organization. At one point last week the Covid-19 count in the community reached 145 cases, “So there is a need to slow down our positive case numbers immediately,” Secretary-Treasurer and Councilman Glendon Smith said in the January 7 announcement.

The closure recommendation comes from the Covid-19 Response Team, including the Indian Health Service, tribal Health and Human Services, Community Health and Emergency Response.

Employees of essential ser-

vices—such as law enforcement, fire and safety, Utilities and essential health, for instance—remain at work.

This is similar to the events of spring 2020, when the virus first appeared in the community. In 2020 the covid shut-down began on March 30, with an idea of re-opening in mid April. Unfortunately, with no vaccine yet available at that time, the organization shutdowns lasted through much of the year, along with school closures.

The difference this year is that most people in the community are vaccinated against covid, and many have been boosted. This greatly reduces the risk of serious illness, hospitalization and death. The vaccines and boosters are effective against the recent wave of the

Omicron covid variant, the booster especially so:

Blood samples taken a month after a booster showed people harbored levels of omicron-neutralizing antibodies that were similar to amounts proven protective against earlier variants after two doses. “The emergence of Omicron further emphasizes the importance of vaccination and boosters,” according to a January U.S. Centers for Disease Control report.

Because of a staffing shortage due to the current wave, Indian Head Casino also had to close to the public. The current tribal organization shutdown calls for the return to regular work on Monday, January 17. Listen to KWSO 91.9 for the latest updates.

Academy closure

The Warm Springs Academy also closed this week because of the increase in cases throughout the community. The school district board made this decision as a partner and in cooperation with the Confederated Tribes, said district superintendent Jay Mathisen.

The goal of the district is to keep all schools open, and this has been successful since the beginning of the school year 2021-22. However, in the present circumstances:

“In partnership with the Confederated Tribes, 509-J has deferred to Tribal Council and their Covid-19 taskforce for protocols to protect individuals against covid throughout the pandemic on tribal lands,” Mr. Mathisen said.

See **SHUTDOWN** on 2

New jail project now in siting phase

The team working on the Warm Springs Jail project have identified a potential preferred site for the future facility. The site is lot along Highway 3, up the grade from 26, by the Media Center on the way to the industrial park.

The project is in the early planning phase, and Tribal Council will review the proposed preferred site before any final decision, said Nancy Seyler, Public Safety acting general manager.

The facility will be funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs—Department of the Interior.

The tribal leadership has been advocating for a new tribal jail for about a decade. Last summer Interior announced the project will be funded. The announcement came after Starla Greene, Corrections Lieutenant, made extensive documentation of the problems at the former jail, which is no longer in use, located by the Police station and Dispatch.

Ms. Greene’s documentation demonstrates that a new facility is warranted, as addressing the needed improvements at the existing facility would be impractical.



D.McMechan/Spilyay

The field along Highway 3 by the Media Center and industrial park, a preferred site for the new jail.

The current Warm Springs Jail was built in 1970s, and is past its lifespan, said Bill Elliott, Warm Springs Chief of Police.

The tribes contract with the Norcor corrections facility at The Dalles to house inmates beyond the time of initial arraignment. The BIA also funds the Norcor contract. The drive is 70 miles each way, which is impractical, and another factor pointing to the need of a new Warm Springs facility.

After BIA-Interior last year in-

dicated a new facility would be a funding priority, Ms. Greene and Chief Elliott worked with Ms. Seyler of Public Safety, and James Halliday, Land Services Officer, Land Use and others.

The team has considered a number of sites. Based on the preliminary architecture plans for the new facility, the infrastructure needs and accessibility, the team identified the Highway 3 lot as the potential preferred site. The jail will be a 60-unit facility. A final site decision

would be pending Council review and approval, Ms. Seyler said. Representatives from BIA-Interior will also visit and review the options, she said.

The funding for the facility, including the needed infrastructure improvements, will come through the Department of the Interior—Facilities Management and Construction—Indian Affairs Office.

— Dave McMechan

Clinic changes for check-in, pick-up, lab visits

The Warm Springs Clinic is working to safely move the outdoor operations back inside.

To keep patients and staff safe, the clinic staff will continue to take the following actions:

- Screening—All patients must enter through main entrance, that is, the Green Tent area.
- Full masking—The mask must cover the mouth and nose at all times.
- Safe distancing—The clinic will need to limit the number of people in waiting areas.
- Hand hygiene—Sanitizer will be located throughout the clinic.

Call before you come in:

Schedule your appointment for medical, dental, optometry or Community Health programs.

Walk-in appointments may be restricted or unavailable.



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Edison Yazzie, Tribal maintenance, by the Clinic Green Tent area.

• Call Medical Nursing at 541-553-2610 to verify lab orders are ready.

• Please call the clinic at 541-553-1196, or the re-fill hotline at 541-553-2475 to ask for refills and to check on your medications before you come to the clinic.

• Please come inside to your appointment alone. One person

may accompany those needing assistance such as elders, minors, disabled or those needing wheelchair assistance.

When you arrive:

You do not have to stop at the entry gate. Follow signs to patient parking area

For any appointment, go to the

main entrance—the Green Tent—for screening and check-in.

• Medication pick-up: To avoid an over-crowded waiting area, please call Pharmacy at 541-419-4371 from your car.

If you do not have a car or phone access, please check in at the Green Tent before you enter the building. You will be asked to wait in your car or in the Green Tent waiting area until a room is open for medication pick up. Contact us with comments and suggestions: Shawnetta Yahtin, Patient Experience specialist, 541-553-2487; or any clinic administrator at 541-553-1196.

Thank you in advance for your help and patience as we work through this change to return to more normal operations.

The Warm Springs Health and Wellness Center.