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NOVEMBER 6

Siuslaw News

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SERVING WESTERN LANE COUNTY SINCE 1890

FLORENCE, OREGON

Florence experiences dramatic rise in HIV, flu

Lane County Public Health worried over high levels of 3 preventable diseases in Florence area

By JACK DAVIS
Siuslaw News

Lane County Public Health Services (LCPHS) has discovered five new cases of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in Florence over the past month, a dramatic rise over historic averages.

According to LCPHS Information Officer Jason Davis, from 2006 to 2015, there were only 118 cases reported in Florence. That averaged to one case per month.

"We have been tracking on (the five individuals) to try and figure out a relationship," Davis said. "Once we had a potential hypothesis that these cases were connected, we went ahead and consulted with our community partners and decided to take a more broad approach to alert the Florence community to work to reduce the number and spread of HIV in Florence."

Davis said the five cases have ties to one individual, and there were two factors involved. One is intravenous drug use. The other is unprotected sex.

According to Davis, Florence does not currently have a free 24-hour testing resource, but LCPHS is working

with PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Medical Center and the HIV Alliance in Eugene to establish local testing for HIV.

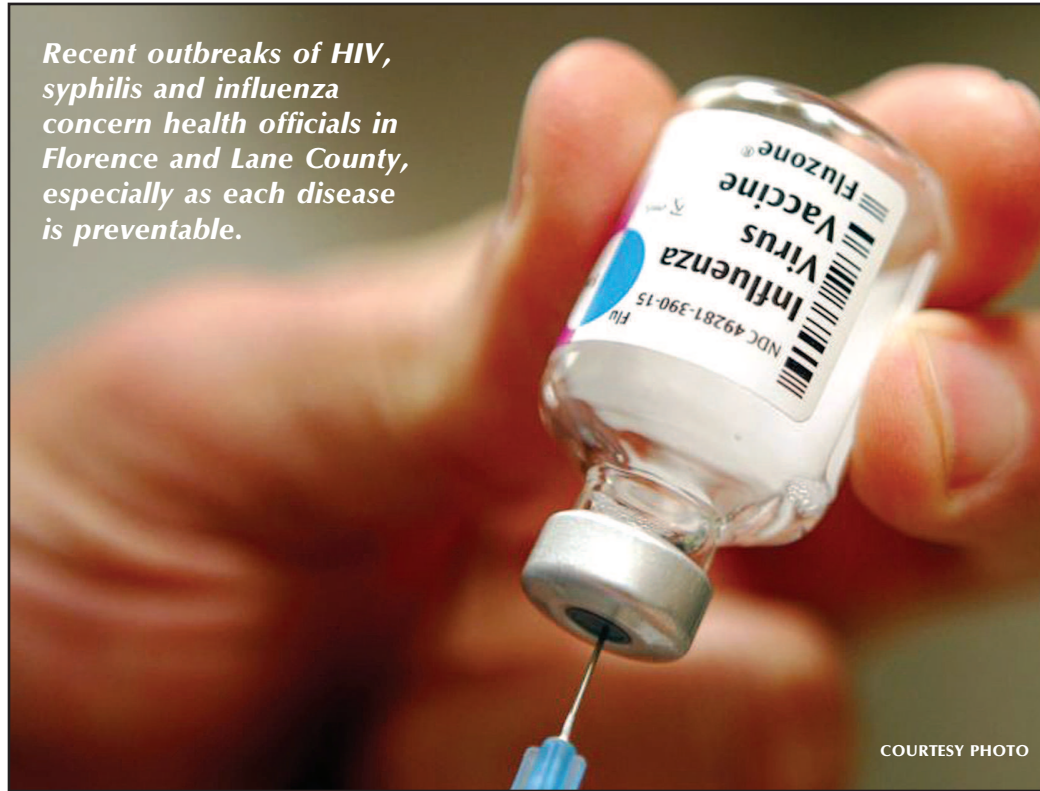
"We are still setting up the facility at Peace Harbor Hospital. We hope to have that up and going within a matter of days," Davis said. "We are working with them to offer an open door, no judgment pass for people without insurance or money to get tested."

In the meantime, people can call the HIV Alliance at 541-342-5088. It will provide information and a timeline on where and how to get tested.

"When you call the HIV Alliance, identify to them that you are from Florence and that you are looking for ways to get tested," Davis said.

He said the HIV Alliance is also

Recent outbreaks of HIV, syphilis and influenza concern health officials in Florence and Lane County, especially as each disease is preventable.



COURTESY PHOTO

establishing a local needle exchange program.

"When you call, they will give a site within the county where their van will do a 'no questions asked' and no identity required needle exchange," Davis

said. Davis's biggest frustration is that HIV is preventable if proper precautions are taken.

"We urge people to use condoms and also take advantage of needle exchange

programs," Davis said. "If people choose to use intravenous drugs, they should do so with a clean needle and do not share needles."

HIV/AIDS has seen a resurgence in the last decade. Davis said about 62 percent of the population of men who have sex with men and who have HIV do not use protection.

"HIV in the '80s and '90s was a death sentence and people took it very seriously," Davis said. "Our rates of protected sex were very high and that really helped the downturn of HIV/AIDS in the U.S."

"However, in the late '90s and up until now, we have been developing better treatments for HIV/AIDS so it is no longer a death sentence — it is a life sentence. You still have it, but it is treatable, like diabetes or other life-long diseases. This has lessened the concern and, as a result of that thinking, we have seen a drop off of condom use and other safe sex practices," he added.

One of the other health concerns facing Florence is a high number of flu cases at Siuslaw Middle School and other area schools.

See **OUTBREAK 11A**

HONEYMAN STATE PARK

Woahink turf target of vandalism

By MARK BRENNAN
Siuslaw News

Repeated acts of vandalism at Lake Woahink have prompted Oregon's park service to ask the public for assistance in deterring future incidents of destruction.

Justin Helberg, a park ranger at Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park, reported that vandals have struck the picnic areas in the East Woahink area of the Park.

"The day use area has been impacted by some turf vandals coming and driving on the large open spaces throughout the park, devastating the resource in a manner that is going to be really difficult to recover from," he said.

And while most incidents of vandalism are one-time affairs, that doesn't appear to be the case here.

"This is at least the sixth or seventh time that we have had resource damage, particularly done to the turf by driving on it," Helberg said. "And unfortunately each event has escalated in scale."

While Helberg believes the acts are intentional, he feels that the individuals



PHOTOS BY MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

Honeyman State Park Ranger Justin Helberg shows some of the damaged turf vandals left behind after driving on open spaces in the East Woahink Lake day use areas.

involved may not realize the impact the "joy riding" has on the turf and the larger eco system.

"It seems like maybe a harmless thing to do, but the first time it happened, I spent at least six hours doing turf repair,



along with other staff members that were donating their time," Helberg said.

The upkeep and maintenance of the public areas is the primary responsibility of the park rangers and Helberg and his colleagues take that duty seriously.

He said, "Park employees are here to protect the resource and to provide safe spaces for recreation that are scenic and esthetic in value. This is one of those spaces."

The repair for the vandalized areas is not a simple process. It will take months to return the turf to its original condition.

See **TURF 11A**

Dickerson takes over as Siuslaw Valley operations chief

New operations chief started Monday

By JACK DAVIS
Siuslaw News

Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue's new Operations Chief James L. Dickerson began work Monday, Oct. 31, replacing retiring 35-year Siuslaw Valley veteran Marvin Tipler, who finished his last day yesterday.

Dickerson was previously the Training Chief for the Netarts Rural Fire Protection District. He was selected from seven applicants for the position in Florence.

Siuslaw Valley Fire Chief Jim Langborg said, "James was very attractive to us. He came with a lot of experience. He has experience both with career departments as well as volunteer departments. We are excited to have him on board."

According to Langborg, the operations chief oversees the operations of the district, including everything that comprises a response: equipment, training, deployment, procedures and personnel management.

Dickerson, 38, said, "I'm extremely happy to be here. When I first decided to come to the Pacific Northwest, there



JACK DAVIS/SIUSLAW NEWS

Siuslaw Valley Operations Chief James L. Dickerson

were three distinct areas I was looking at and Florence was No. 1 on the list."

In addition to his credentials as a firefighter, Dickerson is a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and is trained in water rescue. "He has a very strong background," Langborg said. "He ran the Firesides program at Tillamook Community College. He also ran their Emergency Medical Technician program."

Langborg was also impressed with Dickerson's experience with both career and volunteer fire departments.

"As we grow as an organization, at some point we may have personnel on shifts, so having someone with that

See **OPERATIONS 11A**

Tuesday, Nov. 8, is
Election Day
Don't forget to vote!
An official ballot
dropbox is at Florence
Justice Center, 900
Greenwood St.

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Full Forecast, A3

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