

TESTING from page 1A

access testing. We hope that by bringing the testing to them, we remove some of the barriers.”

Lane County’s testing in the Siuslaw Region comes as Oregon as a whole has seen increasing numbers of COVID-19 in recent weeks. Multiple measures have been taken recently, including a statewide requirement that all residents 12 and older wear masks in public, effective today (July 1).

LCPH’s program helps to gain a larger understanding of the virus in the region. One of the keys to this is offering tests for free to all residents, regardless of age or whether or not they have symptoms.

“The testing is currently being funded by LCPH, but we hope to be reimbursed by FEMA,” Davis said about the funding for tests.

Although the tests are free, LCPH is asking people to bring insurance cards if they have them to help with funding the program.

“Since most insurance companies, including Oregon Health Plan, are covering COVID tests, the insurance piece helps us offset costs as reimbursement is rarely complete,” Davis said.

LCPH offers both nasal and throat swabs for testing. While there will be wait times, the test itself only takes a matter of minutes. After providing basic information such as name, address and phone number, participants are asked a short series of questions regarding their current state of health. After a swab is taken, participants are told that they will be notified by

LCPH within 48 hours as to whether or not they test positive.

“No news is good news,” LCPH employees told participants in Mapleton, who came from various parts of the Siuslaw region including Deadwood, Mapleton and Florence.

“I’m interested in knowing,” local resident Kirk

“I would say that our healthy future is dependent on us, as a community, depoliticizing public health. Testing is a proven strategy to control the spread of disease. The way in which public health efforts have been used for political gain doesn’t help anyone in the long run. We are not a partisan organization. We serve all community members and we report to all elected officials regardless of political affiliation.”

— Jason Davis,
**Lane County Health and Human Services
Public Information Officer**

Mlinek said as he was waiting in line. “I think it’s important to know and I’m looking to add to the national database so that the statistics are correct and the right decisions can be made down the road.”

Mlinek stated that he was in Washington State at the end of February for a music festival, but came down with eight COVID symptoms on the last two days of his trip.

“The guy I went with got sick and was diagnosed with the flu,” Mlinek said.

But during the early days of the pandemic, upriver communities became fearful that the disease was already rapidly spreading.

“There’s also a rumor in this area where the disease may have passed through here in November, December, January and even in February,” said resident Bill Grable, who also attended the Mapleton testing. “People were getting ill and having some of the issues, but not all of them.”

Grable himself got sick during that period, but it

passed. “I had a hunch that I might already test positive,” he said.

At the beginning of the pandemic, testing in Oregon was limited so it was difficult to see a true picture of where the region, let alone Lane County, stood with the virus.

The current round of

LCPH testing won’t solve the question of the virus’ spread in January, as the agency is only testing for the live virus; this is not an antibody test, and will not tell if someone has recovered from the virus.

Still, Davis said that the current testing will help LCPH gain information to help prevent future spread.

“This testing is called reservoir testing,” he said. “It aims to identify if there are ‘reservoirs’ of undetected COVID in our rural areas. This helps us understand how COVID is moving through Lane County and where the next cluster might be.”

He called it prevention at its finest. “The earlier someone knows they have COVID, the sooner they can isolate and avoid spreading it,” Davis said.

Those who do test positive will be asked to go into quarantine, and contact tracing will be initiated to determine if anyone else may have contracted the virus.

Prevention is what Chris Carson and his family wanted as they stood in line at Mapleton.

“It clears the conscience,” he said. “I don’t want to pass it on to anyone else. It’s conscientious for myself and my family, that if any one of us was sick, we would know to stay home even more.”

Neither Carson’s family, nor the majority of those taking the tests, currently had symptoms.

“I feel fine,” Marty Albright said as she waited in line. “No symptoms, but I’ve never tested. And it is a political statement, too.”

Albright stated that she was testing because U.S. President Donald Trump had suggested not to.

“That’s my primary reason, and you may quote me,” she said.

While the politics surrounding COVID-19 are delicate at this point, Davis hopes that people will not avoid testing because of it.

“I would say that our healthy future is dependent on us, as a community, depoliticizing public health,” he said. “Testing is a proven strategy to control the spread of disease. The way in which public health efforts have been used for political gain doesn’t help anyone in the long run. We are not a partisan organization. We serve all community members and we report to all elected officials regardless of political affiliation.”

For LCPH, testing is about the numbers, which Albright agreed with.

“You need these numbers to find out where hotspots are so they can help abate them and treat them. It’s really important for these

researchers to have these numbers, in my opinion,” she said. “So here we are.”

Florence COVID-19 testing will be conducted on Wednesday, July 1, between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. at

Florence Food Share, 2190 Spruce St.

For more information, visit www.lanecountyor.gov or call LCPH at 541-682-4041.

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Brown said that the choices each Oregonian makes in the coming days could have a tremendous impact on reducing what recent days have shown as an alarming increase in the spread of COVID-19.

“Face coverings that cover your nose and mouth play a critical role in reducing the spread of this disease because droplets from our breath can carry the virus to others without us realizing it,” said Brown. “If we all wear face coverings, practice six feet of physical distancing in public, wash our hands regularly, and stay home when we are sick, then we can avoid the worst-case scenarios that are now playing out in other states.”

Brown said she wants to avoid the need to close down businesses again like

other states have begun doing. “If you want your local shops and restaurants to stay open, then wear a face covering when out in public,” she added. “Please keep your Fourth of July celebrations small and local. We saw a lot of new COVID-19 cases following the Memorial Day holiday. Another spike in cases after the upcoming holiday weekend could put Oregon in a dangerous position.”

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) will take the lead, along with other state and local agencies, in enforcing face covering requirements for all covered Oregon busi-

nesses. A spokesperson from the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems said they support the governor’s decision for a statewide public face covering requirement.

“With cases on the rise rapidly across the state, it is now more important than ever to take this step to protect our loved ones, our neighbors, and our communities,” said Becky Hultberg, CEO of the OAHHS. “Further, if we are to coexist alongside the disease, wide adoption of public face coverings is an essential factor in keeping our businesses and public spaces open.”

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