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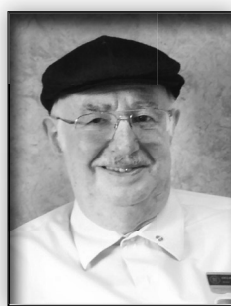


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COVID from page 1A

Two weeks ago, LCPH came to the Siuslaw region and offered mass testing to 200 local residents, with only one case being reported from the Mapleton testing.

"But here's the catch — COVID spreads quickly," Davis said. "It can go from no community spread to community spread in two days. These definitions aren't really super helpful, other than 'Right now, right here, I'm safe.' But in a few hours, you might have COVID. All of this is dependent on individual actions."

Davis believed the situation in Florence was aggravated by the number of tourists flooding into the region, filling up parking lots and crowding downtown streets.

"You live in a beautiful place. We are certainly trying to do our very best to discourage people from unnecessary travel, to encourage them to stay home if they can or reevaluate their travel plans. But it's a hard thing to message," Davis said. "We don't necessarily think anybody in Eugene and Springfield necessarily needs to go to Florence."

Still, the crowds are coming, which creates an issue for the unique population of the area.

"Your community skews older, which presents challenges as well," Davis said. "We've seen the majority of people that are dramatically

impacted by COVID tend to be older."

It's those factors that spurred Davis to say Florence residents should stay home.

However, getting the message across is difficult.

"In public health, we take a harm-reduction approach. Basically, the assertion is that when it comes to anything from seatbelts to speeding, people don't fully grasp or behave in a preventative fashion until they have experienced the negative results of an action," Davis said. "Since it's not our business to go out and spread diseases so we can be more effective in our messaging, all we can do is say, 'Hey, we understand that you want to get outside. We understand that this is tough. If you go outside and you see a gathering of people, walk around them, cross the street, don't go near them.'"

It's also vital for residents to follow safe practices when they are at home as well.

"If you're going to have a gathering in your house, and it's three people, examine whether or not you have to do it," Davis said. "If you feel like you absolutely have to do it, make sure you have six feet between everybody in your house and make sure you have a mask on if you can. And if the options are available, meet in the backyard instead of inside the house. It's just little things like that. If you have to do these activities, try and do it as safely as possible."

It's particularly important to adhere to safe practices during personal interactions.

"The workplace is a perfect example," said Davis. "So, we have these businesses where there's no transmission happening on the floor. Not a single customer is getting sick. The only people who are getting sick are those who are wearing masks all day long. That's because, as soon as they get off work, they go on back and share a cigarette with someone. You just completely defeated the purpose of this whole thing."

Davis stated that the regulations imposed by the state aren't simply to check a box on a prevention list, but to encourage behavior that leads to actual results.

"There's a changeable outcome to this behavior. If you don't practice it all the time, you miss the point," Davis said. "If you wear a mask

when you go to the grocery store, wear a mask when you invite friends over — because it's the same type of interaction."

The warnings come as Oregon Gov. Kate Brown extended mask requirements to outdoors and restricted private gatherings to 10 people or less on Monday.

"The COVID-19 disease is spreading rapidly across the entire state of Oregon," Brown said in a news conference. "Each and every one of us needs to take action — immediate action — to slow the spread of the disease."

Oregon has seen more cases reported in the past week than it has for the entire month of May. July also saw 100 cases reported in a single day, which hasn't occurred in over a month.

Half of all current cases are people under the age of 40, and the state recorded its second death from someone in their 30s.

"We have done so much, we have come so far, we have sacrificed so deeply — we cannot let this virus get the best of us," Brown said. "Today, we are sounding the alarm because we are at risk of allowing the virus to spiral out of control. This is what we saw in New York this spring, and it's what we're seeing today in Texas, Florida and Arizona. The question now is whether Oregon will be the next New York or next Texas."

Starting today, July 15, face coverings are also required outdoors if people aren't able to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet.

"Any time you are outdoors and can't manage a physical distance of six feet, and you are with people you don't live with, please, please, please put on a face covering," said Brown.

As for enforcement of the mandate, the governor stated that it would still be up to businesses to enforce the rule.

"If a restaurant has outdoor seating, if a grocery store has a line out front or if a venue is hosting an event, businesses will have to include face coverings outdoors as part of their operation plan, just as they have for indoor spaces," she said.

Brown stated that there has been a statewide enforcement team that has been tasked with ensuring businesses are

enforcing face covering requirements. Over the Fourth of July weekend, the task force visited over 800 businesses across the state.

"For those businesses that are not following the rules, there will be serious consequences, including citations, fines and ultimately closing down businesses that refuse to protect their employees and their customers," Brown said.

Additionally, the governor mandated that private gatherings, such as potlucks, dinner parties and book clubs, cannot exceed 10 people. The rule does not apply to businesses or churches, which have been implementing state mandates and have not been a major cause of spread in Oregon.

"Indoor group social gatherings are fueling much of the spread," said OHA Director Pat Allen. "Since Oregon began reopening, we've seen new clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 when people get together inside, especially in small social gatherings with family and friends. It's understandable why this occurs. You're with family and friends and that feels inherently safe. People think less about taking the precautions they need to protect themselves and their friends and family from COVID-19."

Brown was aware that the state would not be able to enforce the private gathering mandate.

"I'm not going to set up the 'party police,'" she said. "The proof will be in the numbers. Either people will adhere to this requirement and become a positive force for stopping COVID-19, or I will be forced to take more restrictive measures. No one wants that."

Other states in the nation, including Texas and California, have taken steps to close bars and restaurants entirely as their infection rate spreads. Brown has not gone that far yet, hoping that people will take personal responsibility to help slow the spread. However, if the numbers in Oregon do not begin to decrease, "nothing is off the table," she said. The state may see a return to some of the shutdown mandates seen at the beginning of the pandemic.

"I want the press and the public to note that so many Oregonians are already wearing face coverings and limiting their in-person social gatherings — Thank you, thank you," Brown said. "I know this is hard. It's really hard. It's lasting much longer, and the virus is much tougher to beat than any of us would ever wish."

But despite the majority of Oregonians' best efforts, the virus has still spread.

"It may still be possible for us to keep bars, restaurants and shops open, to gather again in larger groups, to continue to hike, camp and go to parks," Brown said. "But it all depends on us. Our choices will determine our future."

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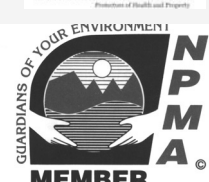
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