

**Safety** *from A1*

as a result of the state's increase in coronavirus cases and Lane County, too, has felt the COVID-19 surge as it reported its highest count in a day of 40 cases on July 18.

Daily case counts have dropped to fewer than 10 since then.

As of July 21, the county has had a total of 406 cases, 54 of which are currently infectious with one person hospitalized. To date, 33,538 tests have been conducted and three deaths have been reported as a result of the coronavirus.

More locally, Lane County Public Health data lists ZIP code 97424 as having 12 cases.

Based on contact tracing and investigations, county health officials say new cases have predominantly been travel-related as Lane County residents travel to other areas and return to infect others in small gatherings.

Governor Kate Brown has said that restaurants and bars do not appear to be sources of "significant" spread, so she will not shut them down for now. But she has added that "nothing is off the table."

In an effort to mitigate the strain of ongoing health requirements

on businesses, free face masks have recently been made available to the area.

As Lane County received 48,000 KN95 masks from the State Office of Emergency Management to support small businesses, last week the City of Cottage Grove received 1,500 of that bulk.

The masks are disposable and available for small businesses of 50 or fewer employees.

"They're not medical grade," said City Manager Richard Meyers. "They're just regular face covering masks."

The masks were first made available at the Cottage Grove City Hall this Monday. By the end of the day, 100 masks had been picked up by nine businesses and should the city eventually run out, more can be requested.

The free masks can be picked up at City Hall during office hours, which are 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Businesses are encouraged to have a representative come to City Hall to pick up masks, which are to be used specifically for employees.

Though this may provide some relief for staff, local businesses have also seen an ebb and flow of a customer base which is frequently sub-

jected to new socialization requirements.

Food and beverage establishments in particular have noted that customers are often walking in to businesses without a clear understanding of the current rules.

"What we try to do more than anything is communicate, communicate, communicate," said Jakelen Eckstine, head server at Axe and Fiddle.

In restaurants and bars, the rule of thumb is that patrons should keep a mask on unless they are sitting at their designated table eating or drinking.

"When you get up from your table or you're walking anywhere — like walking to the bathroom — get that mask up," advised Smith.

One added element of stress for small businesses, though, is that state mandates have effectively made staff the enforcement arm of the public health requirements. This puts businesses, especially in the hospitality industry, in the awkward position of policing their establishments.

Smith has tried to take a friendly approach to enforcement.

"[The rules] are there for a reason. They're there for the safety and well-being of our community," said Smith. "So

we start with not blaming anyone. I think that's a great place to start."

Staff at the newly opened Covered Bridge Brewing Group, too, are trying to strike a balance.

"We want to make people feel as welcome as possible during these crazy times — and safe," said part-owner Chrissy Chapman. "We're trying the best we can to comply in as pleasant a way as we can."

Customer pushback against the requirements has been relatively rare according to several establishments.

"As the days go by and it becomes more routine, it's getting less and less," Chapman attested.

Businesses noted that one challenging point to get across is that the requirements are not a political statement.

"Our jobs are on the line if we don't follow these," said Chapman. "It is up to us to enforce those rules."

Enforcing those rules comes at some cost to the businesses, too, as public health guidelines require a high degree of attention.

"It's something we're definitely taking very seriously," said Eckstine. "We're following the mandates as closely as possible."

In addition to providing staff with pro-

TECTIVE equipment, food and beverage businesses must keep a constant eye on sanitation levels.

This means that despite an economic slump, in some cases more staff are required to get the job done.

The Axe and Fiddle, for example, brings in a "quasi-host" to control evening traffic for seating, said Eckstine.

Restaurants and bars are also volunteering to provide masks to customers who forget their own, adding a bit more to costs.

And because mandates could change at a moment's notice, businesses must constantly keep staff up to date on the latest guidelines.

Smith said Coast Fork Brewing has regular staff meetings, which are used as a training ground to stay updated and communicate safety precautions.

"We talk about things right down to the amount of bleach we put in every bottle," she said. "So everybody feels ready and equipped."

Coast Fork Brewing has implemented some unique practices as well, such as marking tables "sanitized" or "not sanitized" for customer protection. It has also instituted a "speak up" policy to encourage staff to notify others if they think something can be improved.

The policy extends to customers, too.

"I'll never be upset if someone calls something out because I want to be 110 percent and I believe that's true of every business in this community," said Smith.

For the latest state-level information on COVID-19, visit the Oregon website online at govsta-tus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19.

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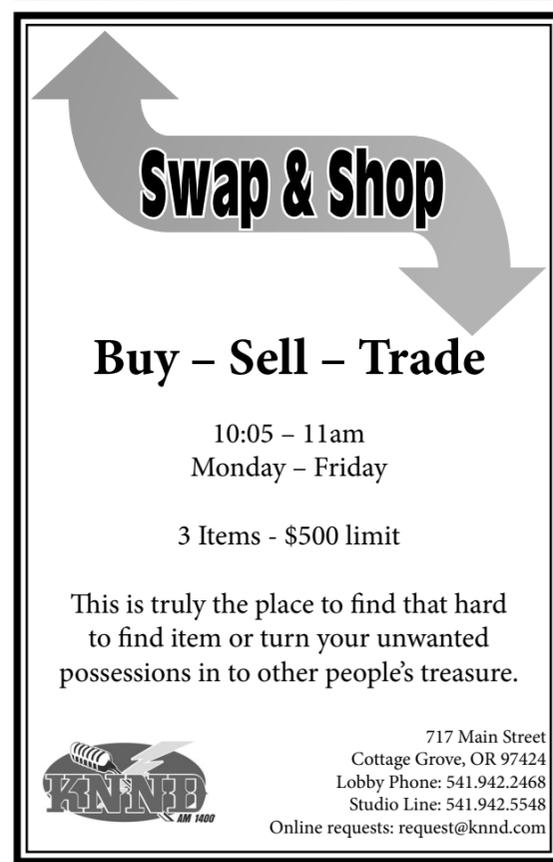
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