

Local & Region

STUDY CONCLUSION BASED ON ANTIBODY TESTING OF OREGONIANS

Study suggests Oregon's COVID-19 count is too low

By Erin Ross
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon's official COVID-19 case count is far too low to be considered accurate, according to a new study that tested Oregon residents for antibodies for the new coronavirus. The research was conducted by the Oregon Health Authority and published as a Field Note in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Since the study period was completed two months ago, the report can't say much about how many people in Oregon have been exposed to COVID-19 as of today.

"Since then, we've accrued a lot of cases," said Paul Cieslak, a scientist at OHA and an author on the study. "Our current estimates of cumulative cases in the state of Oregon are something closer to 2.5%."

The study's relatively high percent of people infected helps confirm the suspicion that a majority of Oregon's COVID-19 cases are going undetected — due in part to testing shortages, inaccurate tests, asymptomatic cases and people who did not receive medical treatment. As of June 15, about 1% of Oregonians had been exposed to COVID-19. That's 10 times higher than the percentage of Oregonians confirmed to have had COVID-19 by that date: around 0.1%.

Although this is consistent with several other studies across the country which show that only about 1 in 10 COVID-19 cases are diagnosed, it is seemingly at odds with OHA's own modeling. OHA partners with the Institute for Disease Modeling at the University of Washington to create models that it uses to plan and estimate hospital capacity. These models consistently estimated that



Karl Maasdam / Oregon State University

TRACE team members demonstrate the testing process during the pilot phase of the project on April 20, 2020, in Corvallis.

Oregon's real case count was 3 to 5 times higher than the confirmed case count, not 10. The most recent model, published Aug. 5, says while 19,200 COVID-19 cases were identified by July 31, the actual cumulative case count was estimated to be closer to 88,000.

Cieslak said despite the study's finding of inaccuracy in Oregon's official COVID-19 case numbers, it doesn't go so far as to call OHA's model into question. All told, 897 Oregonians had their blood tested. Nine of them had antibodies for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Although that's at right about 1%, the small sample size means the actual prevalence could have been much lower, or much higher. Cieslak says once you account for chance and variability, the model estimates are consistent with the potential range of case rates found in this study.

Because the sample size is so small, Cieslak also cautions against using it to determine how many people in Oregon have COVID-19. "It's

just one datapoint," he said. In the months since early June, it has become clear that SARS-CoV-2 is not evenly distributed throughout Oregon.

Outbreaks and super-spreading events have occurred in several counties. In a survey conducted July 25-26, Oregon State University's TRACE study found that 17% of Hermiston residents may have had COVID-19 during their study period. In Malheur County, the Oregon Health Authority estimated that 266 out of every 100,000 people have COVID-19, and with 20% of tests coming back positive, that number could be much higher. Still, some counties continue to see little to no confirmed transmission.

Antibody tests are very good at estimating the number of people who have been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. But in a place like Oregon, where COVID-19 case rates are relatively low compared to other states, the tests aren't very good at telling individual people if

they've had the disease.

Through a quirk of statistics, depending on the accuracy of the test, it's easy to get more false positives than true positives, which means a positive COVID-19 antibody test doesn't necessarily mean you have antibodies for the virus.

Researchers can account for this mathematically, and use the rate of potential false positives and false negatives to estimate the general prevalence of the disease. Because research on COVID-19 immunity is still ongoing, it's too soon to say if the people who have COVID-19 antibodies can get infected again.

Although the data is somewhat out of date and has a relatively small sample size, Cieslak says the results are important: They show that antibody tests can give a much better picture of the spread of COVID-19 than you get by simply counting all the cases. OHA hopes to continue to do further antibody surveys like this one, hopefully with more participants and stronger results.

Baker woman accused of stabbing an acquaintance

■ Mariam 'Evee' Collard, 20, alleged to have stabbed Michael Tugman, 32, while they were huffing canned air

By Chris Collins
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Police say an incident that started with two people huffing canned air to get high at Geiser-Pollman Park Monday afternoon ended with an argument that led to one attacking the other with a knife.

Mariam "Evee" Collard, 20, of Baker City, is being held at the Baker County Jail for the stabbing of Michael Scott Tugman, 32, of Baker City. Tugman was taken to the hospital Monday with injuries that weren't life-threatening, District Attorney Greg Baxter stated in a press release issued Monday night.



Collard

The Baker County Major Crime Team was activated to investigate the incident.

Tugman sustained a slash wound to his left cheek and stabbing wounds on his left triceps outer arm area and left upper rib cage, Baker City Police detective Shannon Regan stated in a court document.

Collard and Tugman were acquaintances and the general public was not believed to have been in danger during the incident, Baxter stated.

Collard was arraigned Tuesday in Baker County Circuit Court on one count of second-degree assault, a Class B felony which on conviction carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 70 months in prison.

Collard also was arraigned on a second-degree disorderly conduct charge, a Class B misdemeanor, for allegedly "engaging in violent, tumultuous or threatening behavior," court documents state.

Regan said Geiser-Pollman Park "was filled with multiple adults and children" at the time of the stabbing.

During Tuesday's arraignment, Judge Matt Shirtcliff ordered Collard held on \$50,000 bail with release possible after posting 10%, or \$5,000. Bob Moon, a Baker City attorney, was appointed to represent her.

Regan stated in the court document that the trouble between Collard and Tugman started about 3:18 p.m. Monday when Collard began recording Tugman while he was under the influence of the canned air product the two had been inhaling in the park. Tugman became upset and told Collard to stop the recording.

He then approached her and the two wrestled over Collard's phone, which she was using to make the video, according to Regan. Collard next grabbed her fixed-blade throwing knife, which measured 5 to 7 inches long, and stabbed Tugman three times, Regan stated.

Collard fled the park and threw the knife behind the Dollar Tree where it was recovered by police, Regan said. Officers then arrested Collard and transported her to the jail.

Baxter said Wednesday that the case will next go before a grand jury for consideration of any additional charges.

FIRE

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Seven fire engines were also assigned to the Baldy fire, along with fire crews from the BLM, the Forestry Department and volunteers from the Ironside Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

Crouch said the availability of airplanes and helicopters wasn't certain Wednesday morning.

Some aircraft could be diverted to deal with new fires started by widespread lightning Tuesday night, he said.

Although the Baldy fire started in an area of grass and sagebrush, it spread to the west into forest, Crouch said.

The fire is primarily on public land but has also burned some private property, he said.

No homes were threatened Wednesday but a private outbuilding along Alder Creek was potentially threatened.

Ranchers also have moved cattle out of the potential path of the fire, Crouch said.

The region's largest blaze, the Indian Creek fire in Malheur County, has also grown, to about 14,000 acres Wednesday morning.

Some of the growth resulted from fire crews conducting burnouts — intentionally igniting fuel between the main fire and control lines, Crouch said.

Lightning from Tuesday's storms ignited at least 20 new fires across Northeastern Oregon, according to fire dispatch centers in La Grande and John Day.

As of Wednesday afternoon, most of the new fires were reported at less than 1 acre. A fire reported Tuesday near Medical Springs was contained at 1.23 acres at 12:55 p.m. on Wednesday.

COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) lists the age, gender and county of residence of people who die as a result of the virus.

The agency's Wednesday update does not include the Baker County death, which the Baker County Health Department announced Monday afternoon.

There is often a lag between county and state data related to the pandemic.

Holly Kerns, a public information officer for Baker County, said county officials would not release any additional details about the outbreak at Meadowbrook Place. The Herald has asked when the first positive test was confirmed at the facility, and whether all the cases are residents or whether some are employees.

The Herald also asked when the person who died had become ill.

When the Baker County Health Department announced the outbreak at Meadowbrook on Friday, Aug. 14, the department's press release stated that "none of the residents or staff are currently hospitalized and no deaths have been reported in connection with the outbreak as of Friday (Aug. 14)."

The OHA's weekly report, issued Wednesday and including data through 11 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 16, attributed 11 cases to the Meadowbrook outbreak.

The agency does not distinguish between cases that result from a person testing positive, and "presumptive" cases, which involve people who have not tested positive but have been in close contact with a person who did test positive.

As of Wednesday, the OHA said at least 51 of Baker County's cases involved residents who had tested positive.

The OHA's weekly report also showed that 50 of the county's cases are residents who live in the 97814 ZIP code, which includes Baker City and parts of Baker, Keating and Sumpter valleys.

The OHA doesn't list the number of cases for any of Baker County's other ZIP codes because all have fewer than 1,000 residents.

The Meadowbrook outbreak is the only one reported in Baker County in a care facility or other type of what health officials call a "congregate living setting."

These include the Baker County Jail, Powder River Correctional Facility, and drug and alcohol treatment centers operated by New Directions Northwest, said Mark Bennett, a Baker County commissioner and the county's incident commander during the pandemic.

Bennett said the county is preparing to hire two new nurses who will work at the Health Department and offer assistance if needed to the county's other congregate facilities as well as schools. The county will use COVID-19 aid dollars to hire the nurses, Bennett said.

In a written response to the Herald's questions about the differences between the Meadowbrook outbreak and the county's earlier cases, many of which health officials weren't able to trace to a specific origin, Nancy Staten, the Health Department's administrator, and Mandy Peterson, who also works at the agency, noted that contact tracing typically is easier in a congregate care setting because residents tend to have close contact with fewer people.

"Sporadic cases in the community are more problematic because there are many sources from where the infection can spread vs when it is in one family/friend group," Staten and Peterson wrote. "It is also a concern when we don't know where the infection comes from. When we can identify the source we can ask contacts to quarantine and stop the spread. If we don't know where the illness is coming from we cannot contact trace and stop the spread."

They also noted, however, that outbreaks in congregate care facilities can be more dangerous than sporadic cases because residents often are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill if they are infected.

According to OHA's Wednesday report, of the 408 Oregonians listed as COVID-19 deaths, almost 49% were 80 or older; almost 75% were 70 or older; and 91% were 60 or older.

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