

More than half of patients at Pendleton hospital tested positive for COVID-19

■ Just 13 of 81 intensive care unit beds east of the Cascades available Tuesday

By Bryce Dole
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — More than half of all patients currently hospitalized at CHI St. Anthony hospital in Pendleton have tested positive for COVID-19, according to a hospital spokeswoman.

The hospitalizations come as Umatilla County reports one of the largest surges in COVID-19 cases in Oregon, reporting about 8% of the state's total cases over the past two weeks despite accounting for just 2% of its population. The county's case rate during that same time period was more than seven times higher than Multnomah and Washington counties, which both have more than 500,000 more residents than Umatilla County.

The surge in cases is emblematic of a statewide spike, especially in undervaccinated areas.

The Oregon Health Authority on Tuesday reported 1,032 new cases statewide. Hospitalizations statewide spiked to the highest totals since April on Tuesday with 259, up 52 since Monday, according to the state.

As of Tuesday afternoon,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Registered nurse Heather McLeod enters a negative pressure room used for COVID-19 patients in the medical/surgical unit at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton on Tuesday, July 27.

July 27, the Oregon Health Authority web page monitoring hospital bed capacity showed that of the three hospital regions east of the Cascades, there were 13 intensive care unit beds available out of 81 ICU beds across the region.

The Centers for Disease Control have reported a four-fold growth in cases over the past month, most driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

The key to the spike: Vaccination. The CDC reports that 97% of those hospitalized for COVID-19 nationwide are unvaccinated.

In Pendleton, CHI St. Anthony hospital has reported a "significant uptick" in positive COVID-19 cases over the past week, nearing peak numbers seen last winter, the spokeswoman, Emily Smith, said in an email. Fourteen people have been hospitalized with the virus over the

past seven days, with eight hospitalized on Monday alone.

Local hospitals will sometimes refer critically ill patients to other facilities for a higher level of care. But regional hospitals have been "unable to accept transfers" because they are full with patients, Smith said.

For one patient in need of a transfer, health care workers reached out to 15 different hospitals before finding one with an available bed, Smith said.

On Monday, the emergency department's physician director reported a threefold increase in patients testing positive in the department over the past five days, Smith said. On Friday and Saturday alone, approximately 40% of patients who came to the hospital with COVID-19 symptoms tested positive. None had been vaccinated against COVID-19.

Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston said over the weekend it was also seeing an increase in hospitalizations and positive COVID-19 tests, but the hospital has yet to disclose any data.

OHA: Wear a mask at indoor public places, even if you're vaccinated

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — In response to a spike in COVID-19 cases in Oregon and updated national guidance calling for masking measures to prevent the spread of the highly transmissible delta variant, state health officials announced Tuesday, July 27 they are recommending that people wear a mask in public indoor settings — including those who are fully vaccinated.

The announcement occurred the same day that the Oregon Health Authority reported 1,032 new and presumed COVID-19 cases, the state's highest daily case count since January based on recent data.

"Today's reported sharp rise in confirmed and presumptive cases and in hospitalizations in Oregon are sobering reminders that the pandemic is not over, especially for Oregonians who remain unvaccinated," said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state epidemiologist and state health officer.

As cases continue to rise across the country, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed course Tuesday on some masking guidelines, recommending that even vaccinated people return to wearing masks indoors in parts of the U.S. where the delta variant of the coronavirus is fueling infection surges.

Citing new information about the variant's ability to spread among vaccinated people, the CDC also recommended indoor masks for all teachers, staff, students and visitors at schools nationwide, regardless of vaccination status.

On Tuesday, Oregon health officials announced that their recommendations apply statewide and not just in areas with high infection rates.

The possibility of reimplemented restrictions — including mask mandates, capacity limits, county risk levels that dictate restrictions and distancing requirements — that were lifted by Gov. Kate Brown on June 30 has also always been a possibility.

COUNTY

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Warner told commissioners the turnover for the museum director position, as a part-time job, has been high, with seven directors in the past eight years.

Terry McQuisten has been the director since March 2020.

Commissioners voted to allocate \$80,000 from the county's share of the American Rescue Plan, which Congress passed in March 2021.

"I think it's necessary and a very

good investment," Commissioner Bruce Nichols said.

The county will receive \$3 million from the federal aid package.

The Museum Commission will also try to raise money through grants and other sources.

Warner said the museum, at 2480 Grove St., in the former city natatorium, did not qualify for the federal Paycheck Protection Program, which was designed to help businesses harmed by pandemic-related restrictions.

Warner estimates the museum,

which was closed at times during the pandemic, lost \$40,000 in potential revenue.

The Bureau of Land Management is talking with county officials about leasing 2,500 square feet in the Heritage Museum to serve as a temporary Oregon Trail Interpretive Center experience while the Center itself, five miles east of Baker City, is closed for more than two years for a major renovation project starting around February 2022.

In other business Wednesday, commissioners voted to accept a bid

from Anderson-Perry and Associates to survey Pine Creek Road, the amount not to exceed \$30,000.

The money will come from the county's insurance company, according to commissioners.

The road, in the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Baker City, is the subject of a civil lawsuit that David McCarty, who owns property through which the road runs, filed on April 30, 2021.

McCarty contends county officials have failed to produce documents proving that there is

a public right-of-way on the road through his property.

On June 16, commissioners approved a resolution "declaring the necessity for the legalization of Pine Creek Lane."

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said the resolution is a preliminary action. It starts a process for designating a county road under a state law — Oregon Revised Statute chapter 368. After the survey is done, the county will schedule public hearings on the matter, Harvey said.

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