

COVID

Continued from Page A1

As for hospitals, Bennett said Baker County COVID-19 patients who require critical care are still being transported to Boise hospitals.

But with hospital capacity statewide being stressed, with more than 1,000 COVID-19 patients, Bennett said the situation can have indirect effects on even smaller rural hospitals such as Saint Alphonsus in Baker City.

He said a patient, who doesn't have COVID-19, was recently moved from Lebanon, in the Willamette Valley, to Saint Alphonsus in Baker City because the Lebanon hospital didn't have space.

"I really hope people realize we are in a public health crisis," Bennett said.

Breakthrough cases

The OHA will start releasing a weekly report on "breakthrough" cases — infections in people who are fully vaccinated.

Previously the state agency had published monthly, and then biweekly, breakthrough case reports.

The next report, with data through Aug. 22, will be released today, Aug. 26.

The most recent report, which included statistics through Aug. 15, showed that Baker County has had 27 breakthrough cases. Almost half of those — 12 — were reported between Aug. 1-15.

That's 8.2% of the county's 147 cases reported during that period.

Statewide, breakthrough cases accounted for 14.4% of Oregon's COVID-19 cases from Aug. 1-15.

There were 20,701 cases during that period, and 2,982 were in fully vaccinated residents.

The breakthrough report does not say whether any of the vaccinated Baker County residents who tested positive were subsequently hospitalized.

Statewide, of the 7,138 breakthrough cases reported during the pandemic, 5.8% of the people were hospitalized, and 0.8% died, according to OHA. The median age of those who died is 82.

Age breakdown

As was the case during July, the largest share of new cases in Baker County during the first half of August involved relatively young residents, according to the Baker County Health Department.

During July, people in their 20s accounted for 27.6% of cases in the county — the highest percentage of any age group based on 10-year intervals.

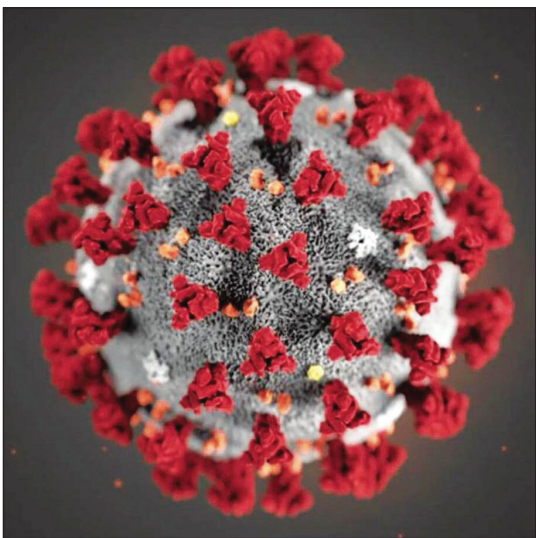
For the first half of August, residents in their 30s had the highest percentage of new cases — 23.4% of the county's total.

That age group has the second-lowest vaccination rate in the county, at 31.4% of the estimated 1,950 people in that age range.

The rest of the age breakdown for Aug. 1-15, ranked by percentage from highest to lowest, and followed by the vaccination rates for that age range, in Baker County and statewide:

- 50 to 59: 17.2% of new cases.

The vaccination rate for that age group in Baker County, through Aug. 24, is 43.5%. The statewide rate is 71.2%.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Contributed PHoto A COVID-19 particle is pictured in this image provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- 60 to 69 years, 15.2% of new cases. The vaccination rate in Baker County is 54.1%. The statewide rate is 76.7%.
• 20 to 29 years, 13.1% of new cases. The vaccination rate in Baker County is 32.2%. The statewide rate is 61.8%.
• 40 to 49 years, 11.3% of new cases. The vaccination rate in Baker County is 41.8%. The statewide rate is 71%.
• 10 to 19 years, 8.3% of new cases. The vaccination rate in Baker County for ages 12 to 19 (residents younger than 12 aren't eligible to be vaccinated) is 34.9%. The statewide rate is 55.1%.
• 70 to 79 years, 4.1% of new cases. The vaccination rate in Baker County is 66.4%. The statewide rate is 85.6%.
• 5 to 9 years, 2.8% of new cases.
• 1 to 4 years, 2.1% of new cases.

There were no cases in the county among residents 80 or older during the first half of August. That age group accounted for 2.5% of the county's cases during July.

The vaccination rate for people 80 and older in Baker County is 68.8%. The statewide rate is 79.1%.

Vaccinations

Baker County's vaccination rate has been higher during August than it was for most of July.

From July 10-31, the seven-day running daily average of vaccine doses administered in the county ranged from nine to 15.

So far in August the running daily average has ranged from 16 to 26 doses.

During July, a total of 336 doses were given in Baker County.

From Aug. 1-23, the total was 475 doses, a 41% increase compared with July. August's total includes 38 doses administered on the 19th and 37 doses on the 20th. Both daily totals were higher than any day since June 11, when 90 doses were given.

Baker County's vaccination rate among residents 18 and older increased by 1.4% from Aug. 14-21, to 48.6%.

That's the seventh-lowest rate among Oregon's 36 counties.

Council OKs contract with forester

By SAMANTHA O'CONNOR

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The Baker City Council voted 5-1 on Tuesday evening, Aug. 24, to approve a five-year contract with Lane Parry Forestry Consulting of Baker City, a pact that will start with having the firm design a timber sale on city property near Goodrich Creek.

Public Works Director Michelle Owen asked the council to authorize the contract.

The city previously had a contract with Lane Parry, but it ended.

According to Owen's staff report, the 102-acre property, in the Elkhorn Mountains about 10 miles northwest of town, was last logged during the winter of 2002-03.

In a written proposal, Lane Parry Forestry Consulting estimated the timber sale would yield a net profit to the city's water fund of \$50,000 to \$65,000.

"The City, as a property owner, has the responsibility to manage its land using good forest practices," Owen wrote in her report. "Utilizing

a professional forestry consultant will provide the best results for our projects."

A request for proposals (RFP) was advertised in July and one response was received by the Aug. 12 deadline.

Mayor Kerry McQuisten, who cast the lone vote against the contract, said she is concerned that the RFP wasn't advertised widely enough and that Lane Parry Forestry Consulting knew the request was going out.

In other business, councilors:

- Unanimously approved sending a letter of support for the Baker City/County Planning Department's application for a grant from the Department of Land Conservation and Development for support in developing a Housing Production Strategies report.

This report is the next step for Baker City to address its housing needs.

- Unanimously appointed Jaclyn Foss to the Golf Board.

OREGON BRIEFING

Activists try to overturn Oregon's newest election laws

SALEM (AP) — Two new laws aimed at expanding voter access in Oregon are under fire from a conservative group that argues the changes will make state elections less secure.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports people affiliated with the group Oregonians for Fair Elections have filed referendum petitions that, if successful, would ask voters to approve or reject the new laws next year. To do that, they'd need to collect 74,680 valid signatures in opposition to each bill by Sept. 24, a tight timeline that could be hard to meet as the state struggles with a resurgence of COVID-19.

The first, House Bill 2681, ensured that voters cannot be labeled "inactive" — and so ineligible to automatically receive a ballot — for the sole reason of not voting. It's an extension of other steps Oregon has taken in recent years.

In 2017, then-Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican, announced the state would no longer label voters "inactive" if they had not voted for five consecutive years. Richardson increased that window to 10 years, and subsequently announced he wanted to end the practice of labeling voters inactive because they had not voted.

Voters can still be labeled "inactive" for other reasons, including not responding when their ballot has been challenged.

The second bill targeted for reversal, House Bill 3291, implemented a change, already in practice in other vote-by-mail states, that will allow mailed ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day and reach officials within a week of the election. Ballots in Oregon have traditionally only been accepted if they are received by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

COVID surge causes Oregon schools to delay start dates

SALEM (AP) — With COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations surging in Oregon at least three school districts have pushed back their start date.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports the Alsea School District in Benton County was set to start Monday. But on Aug. 21, Superintendent Marc Thielman shared a message with families, announcing a delay to the school year due to an elementary staff member testing positive for COVID-19.

The first day of school will now be Aug. 30.

Two other districts, both in Douglas County, have also announced delays. Douglas County has had 1,125 cases per 100,000 people in the last seven days, the highest in the state. In the Oregon Health Authority's Aug. 23 update, Douglas County reported 398 new cases and five deaths between Aug. 20 and Aug. 22.

The school year will now begin Sept. 7 for South Umpqua High School students due to staff members in isolation or quarantine. Superintendent Kate McLaughlin said the school does not have currently have enough staff to open. The district's other schools will open on Aug. 30 as planned.

The Elkton school board, also in Douglas County, voted Monday evening to delay the start of school for three weeks "due to the current surge of COVID cases in Douglas County." School will now begin on Sept. 20.

The total number of Oregon students affected is relatively small. The three small, rural districts serve a little more than 2000 students altogether.

Officials: Firefighter dies while working Oregon wildfire

OAKRIDGE (AP) — A firefighter who died Monday, Aug. 23 while battling a wildfire southeast of Eugene has been identified as Frumencio Ruiz Carapia of Medford.

Ruiz Carapia, 56, was working along the eastern edge of the Gales fire when he was struck by a falling tree, according to a news release Tuesday from Lane County Sheriff's Sgt. Tom Speldrich.

Despite immediate efforts by those around him, Ruiz Carapia died at the scene, the news release said. No other injuries were reported.

An investigation showed the accident wasn't the result of any tree cutting but that the tree unexpectedly snapped and fell to the ground, according to the sheriff's office.

Nearly 600 personnel are working on the Gales Fire, which is within the Middle Fork Complex of fires that started in the Willamette National Forest the week of July 26.

The fires are about 9 miles north of Oakridge, have burned about 25 square miles and have prompted evacuations.

Nevada man pleads guilty to tribal fraud in Oregon

PORTLAND (AP) — The former manager of a construction business owned by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in Oregon has pleaded guilty for his role in a fraud scheme that cost the tribes over \$50,000.

Thomas Valentino Adams pleaded guilty to theft of funds from a tribal organization, and has agreed to pay nearly \$5,000 in restitution to the tribes. He also faces up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. He will be sentenced in federal court on Nov. 15.

Adams, a Nevada resident, managed the Warm Springs Construction Enterprise.

COUNCIL

Continued from Page A1

Johnson contends the governor's mandates violate residents' constitutional rights.

"These rights are not given to us by our government or by medical authorities," Johnson said. "We are born with these rights and it's the duty of the government to protect them, not chip away at them in the name of science or for the good of our health."

Another registered nurse, Diane Merchant from Richland, discussed natural immunity compared with vaccines. She said many people who worked through the pandemic last year were infected with the virus either on the job or in the community.

"When governor Kate Brown said we would all be mandated to take the vaccine or lose our jobs, there was no mention of natural immunity," Merchant said.

Merchant, who has been a nurse since 1999, said she has read studies about vaccines and does not feel "evidence or best practice has been put forth."

Jodi Furtney, owner of Charlie's Ice Cream Parlor in Baker City, spoke against the mandates.

"As the months have progressed through this, I keep thinking that I can't be any more shocked than I already am, and the punch in the stomach can't be any more painful than the previous punch," Furtney said.

She contends the governor's mandates are turning people who don't want to get the COVID vaccine into lawbreakers.

Alisha Alderson discussed the effects the vaccine mandate could have on the community.

"We're currently experiencing a statewide nurse staffing shortage in Oregon," said Alderson, whose husband, Shane, is a City Council member. "Taking away the rights of health care providers to choose what's right and ethical for them and their families will lead to an even greater shortage of providers."

Alisha Alderson said the Oregon Nurses Association is rallying against the mandate. She asked the council to urgently consider all options for the protection of health care providers rights.

City Councilor Joanna Dixon said she opposes both the vaccination and the mask mandates.

"I for one will absolutely not ask any of our city employees to take a vaccination against their will," Dixon said. "I also don't think you need to have to wear a mask against your will. The idea of our children being forced to wear masks for five to six hours in school infuriates me. To see the children out on the playground with masks on is asinine. There is nothing better for your health than fresh air, sunshine, and exercise. And, myself, wearing a mask makes it hard to breathe. And we can't have that happening to our children any more. My

thought is just to push it as far as we can push it. I think (Brown) going to be so overwhelmed, the agencies are going to be so overwhelmed, that they're not going to be able to do anything."

Lloyd Nelson, a chiropractor at the Family Wellness Center, said he has been working with local residents for 36 years.

Nelson said he is concerned that if he doesn't comply with the vaccination mandate, he could lose his license. He said he worries about his patients.

"What are they going to do if I'm driven out of the state or asked to retire or lose my license?" Nelson said.

Baker City Fire Department firefighters, including Casey Johnson, president of the firefighters local union, helped organize the rally outside City Hall.

Baker City Police Chief Ty Duby said police unions across the state are challenging the vaccine mandate.

Outside City Hall, Jayden Freeman, who brought an American flag, said he is "supporting the idea that medical freedom is part of American freedom. I don't think we should have the government forcing us to take a vaccine or whatever just to participate in real life."

Shyanne McCoy said: "For me, it's just the fact that the nurses have been working this whole time without the vaccine and now they're mandating it, and that's not fair to them."

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