

# Umatilla County reports 179 COVID-19 cases in Round-Up outbreak

By **BRYCE DOLE**

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County health officials have traced nearly 180 COVID-19 cases to events that occurred during the week of the Pendleton Round-Up.

But the initial spike in cases that followed the week-long rodeo seem to be on a slight decline, said Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara.

"I'm hoping we've gotten past the initial bump," Fiumara said after reporting the 179 cases. "Time will tell. It will be important for people who are sick to stay home."

County officials were expecting to report a record-high COVID-19 case count last week, but as the week wore on, case counts began to lower. Last week's total amounted to 487 cases, making it the county's third most infectious week since the pandemic started.

It's a positive sign after an alarming initial bump in cases, Fiumara said, but infection rates remain far higher than they were before the delta variant surge began in mid-July.

"It's hard to be happy with cases dropping to 50 or 60 each day," Fiumara said.

The decrease, Fiumara said, also doesn't mean increased COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths won't follow, as they have after previous pandemic surges.

"Both of our hospitals have seen cases and hospitalizations go



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Fans cheer during the grand entry Sept. 18, 2021, of the 111th Pendleton Round-Up at the Round-Up Grounds.

up a little," Fiumara said of Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, and CHI St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton.

Harry Geller, St. Anthony's president, said in an email that the hospital has seen a "significant increase" in patients admitted to its emergency department during the past two weeks. Staff are treating between 45 to 55 patients per day.

"During normal times, we average 32 patients per day," Geller said.

As of Monday, Oct. 4, 10 out of the hospital's 18 inpatients had COVID-19.

"With 25 inpatient beds set up and staffed, we have not yet gone over capacity," Geller said. "We've come close on many occasions, but so far, so good."

### Unvaccinated account for 85% of cases from Round-Up

Data provided by the county health department late last week

showed 85% of COVID-19 cases traced to the week-long rodeo were among unvaccinated people. Health officials have said some of the cases came from people who had COVID-19 symptoms prior to Round-Up but still chose to come.

The Round-Up required no proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 to enter the grounds. Had there been a requirement, Fiumara said some of the infection could have been avoided. He pointed to

college football games in Oregon that have those requirements and have yet to see an outbreak.

There is no state rule that says organizers must require a proof of COVID-19 vaccination or negative test to hold an event.

Pendleton Round-Up General Manager Erika Patton did not return a call seeking comment prior to press time.

Cases stemming from the week-long rodeo have so far been reported in Oregon, Washington and Montana, as well as Umatilla, Jefferson, Morrow, Wallowa and Union counties, according to Mike Stensrud, an epidemiologist with Umatilla County Public Health. The vast majority of cases have been reported in Umatilla County — 166.

But the county still doesn't know if the outbreak could be larger, as contact tracers have only been able to interview 81% of identified cases stemming from the Round-Up.

The county plans to disclose more data soon about where the cases occurred during Round-Up week to inform residents about their likelihood of exposure to the virus and and to inform future event planning.

Umatilla County has reported 13,596 COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began, according to county health data. In all, 129 county residents who have contracted the virus have died.

# Fire retardant could be 'game-changer' in fighting wildfires

By **KEITH RIDLER**

Associated Press

BOISE — U.S. officials on Tuesday, Oct. 5 approved a long-lasting fire retardant that could significantly aid in fighting increasingly destructive wildfires by stopping them before they ever start.

The U.S. Forest Service approved Perimeter Solutions' fire retardant that is intended to be used as a preventive measure and can last for months.

It's similar to the company's red-dyed retardant dropped from aircraft while fighting active wildfires, but it's clear and sprayed by ground-based workers and equipment.

"The real game-changer here is once you treat it, you can forget it," said Edward Goldberg, chief executive officer of St. Louis, Missouri-based Perimeter Solutions. "It's there for the whole year."

The company said its primary use will be by industrial customers such as utility companies and railroads, but it can also be used to protect residential and commercial properties. It's intended to be sprayed on vegetation, not homes themselves, but can be sprayed on such things as wood fences.

The company's existing retardant is also used for that purpose, but can be problematic because it's only effective until rain washes it away. Goldberg said the new product will remain effective even

after a couple inches of rain, making the one-and-done application less expensive.

Cost, Goldberg said, depends on the topography and ranges from \$7,000 to \$15,000 per mile covering a 20-foot-wide strip.

Goldberg said the product will likely be most effective in the drier climate of the U.S. West, and could be applied in the spring to offer fire protection throughout the wildfire season. In July, it was applied to the grounds at former President Ronald Reagan's coastal mountain ranch in the Santa Ynez mountains in California near Santa Barbara.

The company also said the new fire retardant had been applied at the start of the wildfire season along a fire-prone, 4-mile stretch of California's Route 118. That resulted in no fires that season, the company said, after the previous fire season saw 37 fires start along the same stretch of road.

Stanton Florea, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, said the agency had no comment about its approval of the Perimeter Solutions' fire retardant.

Goldberg said the new retardant has the potential to reduce the overall number of wildfires, freeing up firefighters that have been in short supply in recent years.

The fire center on its



Ethan Swope/Associated Press, File

Flames consume a house near Old Oregon Trail as the Fawn Fire burns about 10 miles north of Redding in Shasta County, California, on Sep. 23, 2021.

website said that so far this year, about 46,500 wildfires have burned 10,000 square miles. Those numbers are at roughly the 10-year average for number of wildfires and area burned.

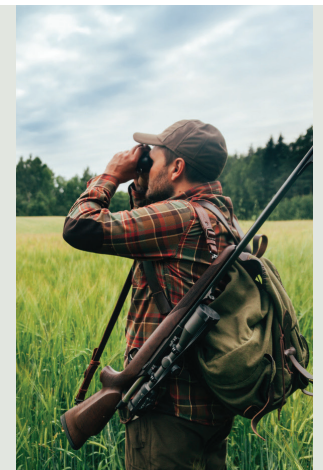
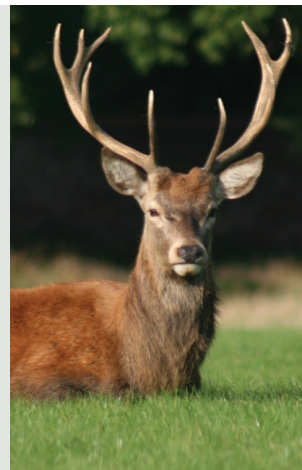
Currently, there are 52 large wildfires, 18 of them in Idaho, nine in California and nine more in Montana.

The center is currently at National Preparedness Level 3, having dropped down from the maximum level 5 earlier this year when resources for

fighting wildfires were hard to come by.

The center said that cooler, more favorable weather will pass through much of the

Western U.S. in the next several days, but that drought conditions still leave the region open for continued wildfire potential.



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