

## PHARMACY

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Musser was referring to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, who in August announced an executive order requiring most health care workers, including pharmacy employees, to be vaccinated or to receive a medical or religious exception by Oct. 18.

It's not clear how much the vaccination mandate has contributed to staffing shortages at local pharmacies. The Herald has not received responses to its requests for comment from the company that owns both Safeway and Albertsons stores, or from Rite Aid.

Donna Coble, who was waiting at Rite Aid Thursday, said she has used the store's pharmacy for years. She's been waiting more than a week for her prescriptions.

"I think we're going to be hurting for a good pharmacy," Coble said.

At Safeway, Ruth Willitts stood in line waiting to fill a prescription for her son. She said this was her first experience waiting in line at the pharmacy.

Willitts said she has transferred her own prescriptions from Bi Mart to Albertsons.

"We were at Bi Mart but we went to Albertsons," Willitts said. "I have not been over there to pick up anything so I don't know if it's just the same situation as here. But this is quite an experience. We're just not used to it."

Janet Van Diepen, who was waiting in the line at Safeway, contends poor management is one of the reasons for the longer waits.

"Obviously, they're completely overwhelmed," she said. "They don't have enough staff to even open the drive-thru which seems like they should pull some from some other part of the



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Customers lined up at the Safeway pharmacy on Thursday, Nov. 4.

store maybe to get at least the drive thru open so then we don't have a line," said VanDiepen.

She said she had been waiting for an hour and it was the second time she was in that predicament this week.

"I called in the day before to get all my prescriptions filled so I would only have to do this once, got up there and they hadn't even filled them yet," she said. "So I had to come back again, stand in line again. I don't know what they can do."

"It's frustrating because no matter when you come, day or night, they're always behind," said Tami Carpenter, who was also in line at Safeway.

Carpenter said she had called from her home in Halfway to see if her prescriptions were ready, and although she was told to expect to wait 20 minutes, the prescriptions were still not filled.

"I feel for them; they're short staffed, nobody wants to work, but poor manage-

ment. Definitely poor management," Carpenter said.

Van Diepen noted that although Bi Mart has been transferring prescriptions from its Baker City store — which had processed about 1,500 prescriptions per week — it's not actually closed yet.

"So what's this going to be when they close and all of their stuff comes into the three places that are left?" Van Diepen said. "It's bordering on a crisis, definitely."

Back on the other side of Campbell Street, at the Albertsons store, Jan O'Grady waited in a much shorter line. She transferred her prescriptions from Bi Mart.

O'Grady said she's angry about the deal between Walgreens and Bi Mart in which the former company bought Bi Mart's pharmacy business, but which is resulting in 56 Bi Mart pharmacies to close.

"I will never use Walgreens no matter what," O'Grady said. "It's one thing in big towns where there is a Walgreens but I

really don't foresee them opening a Walgreens here in the next six months. So, they've kind of screwed us out of Bi Mart and Bi Mart has always been really wonderful."

Jason Yencopal, Baker County's emergency management director, has been talking with state officials about the possibility of getting temporary workers to help with the pharmacy situation.

There were no specific plans as of Friday, Nov. 5.

Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said on Friday morning that the pharmacy situation "is a crisis."

The staffing shortage is affecting the pharmacies' ability to give vaccinations, both for COVID-19 and for the flu, Staten said.

That has led some people to seek help from the Health Department, which also administers vaccines but has limited capacity.

"When people don't know who to call they call us," Staten said. "It's having an impact on us."

## COVID

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fully vaccinated — continue to account for about one in every four cases.

More people older than 70 — who have by far the highest vaccination rates in the county — are being infected compared with late summer and early fall.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) reported on Thursday, Nov. 4 Baker County's first COVID-19-related death in more than two weeks.

A 66-year-old woman, who tested positive on Oct. 22, died on Oct. 28 at her home, according to OHA. The presence of underlying conditions has not been confirmed.

"The Health Department offers our condolences for their family and friends, we are so sorry," said Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department. "This leaves a big impact in our county."

The woman's death is the 30th in Baker County during the pandemic, and the first since Oct. 19.

### Weekly cases dropping

For the week of Oct. 24-30, Baker County recorded 24 COVID-19 cases, the lowest weekly total since mid-July, after which the much more contagious delta variant pushed case totals and deaths to the highest levels during the pandemic.

For the current reporting week, which ends today, Saturday, Nov. 6, the county had 15 cases for the first five days.

The county's test positivity rate has also dropped to its lowest level since mid-July, from 10.2% for Oct. 24-30 to 6.2% for the first five days of the current week.

### Breakthrough cases

For the week Oct. 24-30, six of the county's 24 cases — 25% — were in fully vaccinated people, according to the OHA.

Up until mid-September, Baker County's breakthrough case rate had been well below the statewide average, includ-

ing a county rate of 10.8% from Sept. 12-18.

But in the ensuing six weeks, the county's breakthrough case rate has ranged from 20.9% (Sept. 19-25) to 25% (the weeks of Oct. 3-9 and Oct. 24-30).

The statewide breakthrough case rate dropped from 28.7% from Oct. 17-23, to 24.6% from Oct. 24-30.

### Age breakdown in infections

The infection rate among county residents 70 and older increased during the second half of October.

There were no cases reported in that age range for the first half of the month. During September that age group accounted for 12.5% of the county's cases, and in August for 11.5%.

But during the second half of October, 21.3% of the county's cases were in residents 70 and older.

The rest of the age breakdown for the period Oct. 16-31:

- Ages 60 to 69 — 15%
- Ages 50 to 59 — 13.8%
- Ages 30 to 39 — 13.8%
- Ages 10 to 19 — 13.8%
- Ages 20 to 29 — 10%
- Ages 40 to 49 — 8.8%
- Ages 5 to 9 — 1.3%
- Ages 4 and under — 2.5%

### Vaccination rates

Baker County's vaccination rate of 53% of residents 18 and older is the fifth-lowest among Oregon's 36 counties.

The four counties with a lower rate are Lake, 43.6%; Malheur, 46.9%; Grant, 48.8%; and Gilliam, 48.9%.

The number of vaccine doses administered in the county has risen substantially over the past few weeks, largely due to people getting booster doses.

The running seven-day daily average has jumped from 12 doses on Oct. 20 to 54 on Nov. 3.

Of the 3,240 county residents age 65 and older who have been vaccinated — a vaccination rate of 64% — 11.3% have received a booster dose, according to the OHA.

Among the age group 50 to 64, of which 1,940 residents are vaccinated (48.5%), 3.4% have had a booster dose.

## VACCINE

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Jess Defrees, who has taught science at Baker Middle School and is the Talented and Gifted program coordinator for Baker elementary schools, said the pandemic, and the creation of the vaccines, has been an educational experience.

"It's been pretty exciting to see science at work," Defrees said. "I understand how vaccines work. We've done our due diligence as a scientific community to make sure (the vaccines) are safe."

Defrees and her husband are, like the Swarts, both vaccinated.

Jess Defrees said having Sloan vaccinated is valuable both in protecting her and others.

Her younger daughter, Roslyn, is two, and thus not eligible to be vaccinated. Jess Defrees is also pregnant with the couple's third child.

She said she has talked with Sloan about vaccines — how they work, and how they help protect her and others.

"It's really important that we do our part to protect them and the rest of our community," Defrees said. "(Sloan) has been telling everybody that she's getting her COVID shot today."

Defrees said she's grateful that the Health Department was able to get doses in time for kids to be fully vaccinated — they'll get their second shots in about three weeks — before Christmas.

### Getting the shot

Royce Peterson leans over Sloan with a needle, trying to ease her anxiety.

"Does it hurt?" Sloan asks her mom, who's sitting beside her, with Roslyn on her lap.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Royce Peterson of the Baker County Health Department, left, administers a COVID-19 vaccine dose to Gwen Swart, 5, as she sits on her mom Anna's lap Friday morning, Nov. 5.

"Just a little poke," Defrees tells Sloan.

Peterson tells Sloan that he'll count to three, and that she should cough when he calls out the last number.

She coughs. "Did that hurt?" Peterson asks.

Sloan shakes her head. "You're done," her mom says.

Peterson puts a bandage on Sloan's thigh — she's small enough that she was inoculated in her leg rather than her shoulder — and asks her where she wants the yellow sticker proclaiming that she has had her COVID-19 vaccine.

Sloan points to her shirt, and Peterson presses the sticker into place.

Back in the waiting room, where the just-vaccinated wait for 15 minutes just in case they have a reaction, Sloan tells Anna Swart that "it hurts a little."

### School superintendent glad vaccine available

Mark Witty, superintendent of the Baker School District, said on Friday morning, Nov. 5, that he's pleased a COVID-19 vaccine is available for children five to 11.

"I recognize it's a family choice, but it's another tool families could use to protect children and close family members," Witty said.

He said he hopes the availability of the vaccine for elementary age students will help keep Baker schools

operating in a relatively normal fashion, as has been the case since classes start in late August.

The latest report from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), from Nov. 3, showed no active outbreaks in any Baker schools.

The report, which also lists recent cases in schools, has two student cases at Brooklyn Primary School, the most recent onset Oct. 24, and two students from Baker Middle School, with the most recent onset Oct. 16.

Witty said the number of students throughout the district who have been out of school, either because they tested positive or were a close contact with someone who tested positive, has dropped substantially over the past month or so, from a daily average of 40 to 50 to around 10 to 20.

"We are really pleased that the numbers have declined quite a bit over the past three or four weeks," Witty said. "I think we've demonstrated that we can be successful at keeping the virus out of school."

Although there have been cases confirmed in students and staff this school year, Witty said there's no evidence that the virus has spread within schools.

He credits parents who have kept kids home if they felt ill, the daily health checks that school officials perform on students, consistent mask wearing, and frequent sanitation of surfaces in schools.

Witty said he's optimistic about a proposal, under consideration among state education officials, that could limit the number of students required to quarantine by allowing students who are close contacts to stay in school if they have a negative test.

## ZONE

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Bennett noted that the county does not have an ordinance under which it could declare a no-shooting zone, nor have county officials had county counsel determine whether the county has the authority to do so.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey suggested having a listening session Jan. 12, 2022, to take public input.

Richard Haines, a friend of Davis who also lives in the Pine Creek area, said one of his volunteer roles is with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as the county hunter safety coordinator and firearm safety coordinator.

"I've been doing that for 52 years in different states and one of the things I wanted to just point out to commissioners is that since my house was built many years ago, it hasn't been shot, but there's been a number of incidents of firearms being discharged in the area," Haines said.

Most of the residents in the area live on five-acre parcels.

Micah Huyett, who attended Wednesday's meeting online, said he is a former Marine scout sniper. He questioned why law enforcement didn't take the incidents Davis mentioned more seriously.

"This was not a ricochet, it was ballistically improbable, almost impossible for someone to shoot from the north of Mr. Davis' house and the bullet to maintain enough velocity to go through multiple exterior walls and interior walls," Huyett said. "This appears to be someone's negligence."

Sheriff Travis Ash said his office investigated the incident and spoke to the alleged shooter, explaining the potential consequences of shooting in the area.

Ash said that to further investigate the incident, police would have had to write a search warrant, seize the alleged shooter's guns, and take them to the State Police crime lab for ballistics testing.

"If somebody was injured, we would move further with this," Ash said.



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## GUN SHOW

BUY - SELL - TRADE

November 27th & 28th

Saturday 9am - 6pm • Sunday 9am - 3pm

\$5.00, Children under 12 free

Baker County Event Center (The Old Armory), Baker City, OR 97814

Reservations: Ray (541.519.7482) or e-mail: traderrays@eoni.com

Children under 18 shall be accompanied by an adult.

All Federal, State and Local laws shall be enforced.