

New rules could return 130,000 more students to school this month

Brown: 'We need to give Oregonians hope and encouragement'

By Jackson Hogan and Gary A. Warner
EO Media Group

Oregon is simplifying the COVID-19 infection standards that schools must meet to get students back in the classroom for the first time since March, Gov. Kate Brown announced Friday.

"We need to give Oregonians hope and encouragement," Brown said about the changes.

Brown made the announcement at a press conference along with Colt Gill, director of the Oregon Department of Education, and Dr. Tom Jeanne, deputy state epidemiologist at the Oregon Health Authority.

The new rules will move the focus to infection rates based on individual counties rather than any statewide measurement. While the majority of students in the state will likely be required to continue with distance learning, an estimated 130,000 could return to the classroom as early as this month.

Brown said she believed the moves were the best way forward for the state, despite rapidly rising COVID-19 infections that led Oregon to

report 600 cases on Friday, a new daily record.

"Our updated metrics are based on the latest COVID-19 studies and data, are aligned with CDC recommendations, and bring Oregon in sync with the standards of other states like California," Brown said. "They also help us meet our priority of returning students to in-person instruction. These metrics still place a very high bar for low case counts to open schools, while at the same time providing more flexibility for our younger students."

The Oregon Health Authority has reported 46,460 positive cases and 701 deaths from COVID-19 since it first appeared in the state in February. As in much of the country, the numbers are on the rise after a late summer lull. The New York Times said Friday that its analysis of local and state health records put Oregon's 14-day average of cases up 23%.

The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center reported Tuesday there have been 9.36 million cases of COVID-19 in the United States this year, with 232,374 deaths. Cases have been spiking worldwide, with several European governments once again instituting shutdown and stay-at-home orders. COVID-19 has infected 47.3 million people and led to 1.21 million deaths worldwide.

Brown and the other state



Eagle file photo

School is back in session with students at Prairie City School having the option to return to the classroom or learn online.

officials said students doing distance-only learning are much more likely to struggle with materials. Students who also depend on schools for meals and services such as mental health counseling are not having their needs met. Without citing specific statistics, health officials said studies since the beginning of the pandemic have shown that students returning to class are not a major spreader of infection among themselves or their communities.

Decisions over when a school would be ready to resume teaching would shift to local school districts and county health officials. They would have to meet state "metrics" on infection rates, which would be reviewed by the Oregon departments of health and education.

In a major change, the state said that meeting standards

for elementary schools would allow students from kindergarten through sixth grade to return to class. Previously, students were split into K-3 and 4-6 groups, each needing to meet separate standards to be allowed to return.

Under the system, there are four color-coded categories:

Green Zone: All students from kindergarten to 12th grade would be allowed to return to class. A county must now have fewer than 50 cases per 100,000 residents in a two-week average. Smaller-population counties would have to show less than 30 total cases over that two-week period. The percentage of positive infections would have to be below 5%.

Yellow Zone: Students in elementary school grades K-6 could be taught in person, or in a hybrid program with some classroom time but

some learning done online. The state still recommends that older students do classwork from home. To reach the standard, the number of positive COVID-19 infections would have to remain between 50 and 99.9 per 100,000, while the positive test rate in the county would have to be 5% to 7.9%. Small county case numbers could be between 30 and 44 in a two-week period.

Orange Zone: State officials called this a "transitional" zone that would prepare counties for improvements to reach the yellow zone. Counties in the category could have 100-200 cases per 100,000 residents and positive test rate of 8% to 10%. Small counties could report 45-60 cases over two weeks.

Red Zone: No in-person teaching would be allowed in counties with more than 200 cases per 100,000 residents. Small counties in the category would report more than 60 cases in two weeks. It also covers those with a positive test rate above 10%.

Any school district currently teaching students in person that is in the red zone must transition all students back to distance learning by Jan. 4, 2021.

Brown's office sent the media a list of counties that were eligible, partly eligible and not eligible to re-open school.

Not eligible: Crook, Harney, Jackson, Lane, Linn, Malheur, Marion, Morrow, Multnomah, Umatilla, Washington, Yamhill.

Eligible for K-6: Benton, Clackamas, Columbia, Coos, Deschutes, Douglas, Polk, Wallowa, Wasco, Lake, Lincoln.

Eligible for K-12: Baker, Clatsop, Curry, Gilliam, Grant, Hood River, Jefferson, Josephine, Klamath.

The ability to keep students in school will depend on efforts in their communities to limit the spread of the virus.

"These metrics depend on the public doing its part to reduce Oregon's case rates so that all of our children can return to in-person instruction," said Gill, the Department of Education director. "Oregonians can reduce spread and send our kids back to school by wearing a face covering, maintaining distance, washing hands frequently, and avoiding group gatherings."

Brown said Oregonians should rethink plans of traveling and celebrating Halloween, Thanksgiving and the winter holidays. Gatherings should be small and limited to immediate family or a few friends.

If infection numbers continue to rise, Brown said all options were still "on the table," including business closures and other restrictions.



Pamplin Media Group file photo

State Epidemiologist Dean Sidelinger addresses the media during a tour of the Oregon Health Authority's Area Operations Center for the Coronavirus in March.

Worst day ever for COVID-19 cases in Oregon

600 new cases Friday is the highest daily number yet

By Suzanne Roig
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon recorded 600 cases of COVID-19 Friday, the highest number since the start of the pandemic in March, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Multnomah County alone reported 152 new cases. Washington County reported 91.

"Preliminary data show this increase reflects continued widespread community transmission resulting in small clusters and outbreaks statewide," the OHA said in a daily update.

Some of the cases are coming from gatherings of friends, coworkers, household contacts, travel and workplace exposure, said Deschutes County Health Department spokesperson Morgan Emerson. And as temperatures cool, people are spending more time indoors.

"This can increase risk if you are spending time with people you don't live with," Emerson said. "You should wear a mask and distance any time you're around people you don't live with and socialize outdoors if possible."

The record number of positive test results prompted health authorities to ask parents to not let their kids trick-or-treat on Halloween and to avoid costume parties with people outside their household.

Officials also urge residents to wear a face covering indoors when coming in contact with people outside their household.

On Monday, the Oregon Health Authority reported one more COVID-19 death, bringing the total number of deaths to 692 in Oregon. The most recent death was a 90-year-old woman in Multnomah County.

Nationwide, the number of cases reached 46.8 million with 231,263 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University of Medicine coronavirus information.

Fire damages historic Peavy Cabin

By Jayson Jacoby
EO Media Group

Hunters renting a historic U.S. Forest Service log cabin in the Elkhorn Mountains doused a fire that spread from the cabin's fireplace to a wall and the ceiling on Tuesday, Oct. 27.

Their efforts saved Peavy Cabin, built in 1934, said Kendall Cikanek, Whitman District ranger.

No one was hurt in the fire. The cabin, along the North Fork of the John Day River between Anthony Lakes and Granite, was built in 1934 by George Wilcox Peavy, then dean of the School of Forestry at Oregon State University. A Forest Service employee, Larry Bilyeu, restored the cabin in the early 1990s.

The Forest Service makes the cabin available for rent through a contract administered by Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

"While the fire at Peavy Cabin was an unfortunate incident, it was also a shining example of cooperation and shared stewardship," said Kendall Cikanek, Whitman District Ranger. "Everyone is safe, and the cabin is still standing, and that is thanks to a coordinated response from the hunters staying at the cabin, the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District, and Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort."

The fire started when heat escaped from the fireplace chimney, setting fire to a wall and the cabin's ceiling, according to Kendall Cikanek, Whitman District Ranger.

Flames burned a section of logs on



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

Peavy Cabin was built in 1934 by George Peavy, dean of the School of Forestry at Oregon State University. The Forest Service later acquired the cabin.

the outside of the cabin in one area. The hunters spent much of the night pouring water on the fire, Cikanek said.

North Powder Rural Fire Protection District and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest fire staff arrived early Wednesday, Oct. 28, and confirmed that there was no heat left, he said.

Jay Moore, recreation specialist for the Wallowa-Whitman National For-



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

A fire on Tuesday night damaged the historic Peavy Cabin in the Elkhorn Mountains.

est, said: "Clearly, the cabin will need to be repaired, although we are relieved to see that it remains sealed from the winter weather. We will also explore alternatives to firewood heat to reduce the risk of a future fire."

Peavy Cabin was slated to close for the season on Oct. 31 regardless.

The Whitman District's goal is to have it ready for rental by May 1, 2021.

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