

COVID

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an elevated concern statewide and regionally. There were two available ICU beds in Region 7. There were 92 available ventilators in the region.

With a 10.4% positivity rate, Lindsay said the county would need to ramp up its countywide testing before Jan. 4, when Gov. Kate Brown releases updated school metrics, if schools are to reopen.

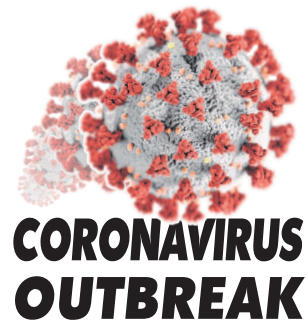
Lindsay said the county must be at, or below, a 5% positivity rate, according to the current metrics.

She said Grant School District is trying to get those metrics changed, as are County Commissioners Jim Hamsher and Sam Palmer, but she said she would like the county to be proactive if the governor does not change it.

“We’ve got to plan for the future and hope for something different,” Lindsay said.

Lindsay said symptoms are typically resolved within the 14 days that they are contacting someone who has tested positive during their quarantine, but that is not always the case.

“There are some individuals that 90 days later do not



have their taste or smell back, some still experiencing a cough,” she said. “While I do think that many are recovered, I could think of no way for us to know this with certainty.”

Hamsher said he thought the health department contacted many of the people who came out for the curbside testing, increasing the county’s positivity rate.

Health Department Clinic Manager Jessica Winegar, who was at the curbside testing at the fairgrounds administering tests, said she disagreed with Hamsher’s assumption.

She said several of the people who came out to get tested did so because they wanted to get tested, and they wanted to see the positivity rate go down in the county.

Tracking COVID-19 deaths

A commenter on Facebook

said the 87-year-old COVID-19-related death was their grandmother who did not die from the coronavirus.

“She was not in the hospital for COVID,” the commenter said. “She had decades of health issues that unfortunately she could no longer manage at the age of 87.”

According to state health officials, there is no difference when tracking and reporting COVID-19-related deaths.

“The choice of the words ‘COVID-19 related’ is intentional. OHA cannot determine the exact cause of death — so our data focuses on people who most likely had COVID-19 and died,” OHA Public Information Officer Carmen Perezchica said in an email. “Sometimes, there is a time difference between the diagnosis of COVID-19 and the person’s death. Sometimes there is a cause of death that may not seem directly connected to COVID-19.”

Perezchica said OHA cannot determine the cause of death in every instance, but instead, the state’s goal is to track people who died with COVID-19. She said this is standard practice in infectious disease reporting.

Justin Lessler, an epidemi-

ologist at Johns Hopkins University, concurred.

“When the doctor is filling out the death certificate, there’s more than one reason for death,” he said. “They are ordered into how proximal they are to death.”

He said, if someone were to die from a COVID-19 infection, the top cause of death is from respiratory failure “because ultimately that’s what happened.” But he said the next reason listed would be COVID-19 because this is what led to respiratory failure.

Lindsay said she wanted to “very clear” that reporting the death of the 87-year-old woman as a COVID-19-related death was not a health department decision.

“Whether we agree or disagree is really beside the point,” she said.

She said the decision was made at the federal level and “pulled down” to OHA’s state level.

Lindsay said there is no financial gain anywhere in the system for a COVID-19-related death.

“There is no payment for coding something as a COVID-related death to the hospital or the health department,” she said.

Letter

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school administrators and other local officials in rural counties.

He said he wants the state to give more autonomy to local officials in designing strategies to combat the spread of COVID-19.

He notes that during the spring, the state required counties to submit detailed plans for state approval before moving into Phase 1, which relaxed some of the restrictions on businesses, church services and other activities that the governor had imposed in March at the outset of the pandemic.

Findley contends that approach “is totally ignored now.”

Palmer said Brown has handed down “edicts.” The elected officials, he said, want to be a part of the conversation about the restrictions, instead of getting an order that says, “This is what we’re doing.”

In the past, he said, rural leaders had to make an effort, as schools closed during the first lock down, to lobby the governor to adjust the metrics so schools could reopen.

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and other local leaders in Owens’ district, including Palmer and Hamsher, were in on calls to give Owens their thoughts to take to Salem.

Hamsher, who said he is on weekly calls with the governor’s office and the White House regarding the pandemic, said local leaders know more about their communities than anyone.

The elected officials said in the letter that they have safely met with school superintendents, the Oregon Department of Education director, county sheriffs, county public health authorities and agency representatives to discuss how to move forward.

They write that nearly half of the restaurants and bars in their respective communities risk closing in six months. According to the letter, the data shared by state health officials does not show that restaurants and bars cause the spike in cases.

“Our hospitality industry is responsible for employing tens of thousands of Oregonians and keeping our already fragile economy moving,” the elected officials said in the letter.

The elected officials said schools need to fully reopen for in-classroom learning. The students should also be allowed to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities, they said. Distance learning should still be available for teachers, students, staff and volunteers who choose not to return to in-person classes.

“If it is safe for college athletes to return to sports,” they said, “assuredly, it is safe for high school students.”

They said that parents need to go back to work, and students and teachers need the classroom’s stability.

The letter said that state agencies need to reopen at all levels, including the Department of Motor Vehicles.

The state agencies and their employees, the letter said, are “essential.” They said the offices are funded with public dollars, and the public needs full access to these essential services.

The elected officials asked the governor to “release our churches and places of worship.” While there have been a couple of “outliers,” on the whole, congregations have been more “scrupulous” about protecting themselves from COVID-19, they said.

“Give pastors, religious leaders, and governing boards the latitude to exercise their best judgment for safety,” the letter states.

Memorial

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auctions, Immoos makes sure that residents at Valley View Assisted Living, Blue Mountain Care Center, Mothers Creek senior home and others around the county receive some form of heat through the purchase of heating supplies such as furnace oil, propane and firewood.

Funds raised also go toward groceries and other needed supplies for hundreds of elderly residents.

Immoos said the importance of the memorial rose this year, especially with the tribulations brought from



Eagle file photo

The Carrie Young Memorial Auction drew holiday shoppers to the John Day Elks Lodge in 2018. The event will be held virtually this year.

COVID-19 to the seniors in Grant County, with some of them being behind doors

at assisted visiting facilities for months without visitors.

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