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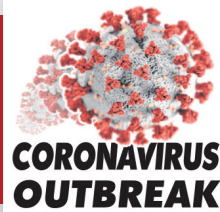
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COVID-19



"THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE GETTING VACCINATED AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES GOING AWAY!"

—Kimberly Lindsay, Grant County public health administrator



Getty Images

Many rapid tests currently not being counted by the state

Local health officials say this distorts positivity rates of rural counties who rely more on those tests

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A state change in counting COVID-19 tests will benefit rural Oregon — once the state figures out how to accurately account for all the tests.

Previously, the state was not counting multiple tests taken by a single person, which failed to account for many negative tests taken weekly or monthly by health and long-term care workers. However, as the Oregon Health Authority is switching its system, rural county health officials say many of the results from the rapid tests they are using, which are reported differently, are not yet being counted at all.



Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara

Grant County Health Department Clinic Manager Jessica Winegar said, like other rural counties, most of its testing is with the rapid tests. She said Grant County sent many more than the 393 rapid tests the state recently reported.

"I am 100% sure," she said. However, she said they cannot recount them after they go to OHA.

Harney County Public Health Administrator Nic Calvin said, as a county that is primarily testing via the rapid and antigen tests, the county's test results are not accurate.

In the first week of November, the state reported two positives and 79 negatives. In reality, Calvin said, Harney County had between 10 and 20 positive rapid test results that week.

State health officials did not immediately respond to the Eagle's request for comment. Eastern Oregon health officials said the state is aware of the problem but has not provided a time frame in which they expect to fix it.

The problem

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said rapid tests, which account for a majority of the types of tests administered in rural counties, will not be counted for the next couple of weeks.

OHA said laboratory tests comprise the majority of tests given in Oregon and as such are the bigger priority, he said.

Fiumara said, not only does the delay in counting the test results impact the severity of county lockdown measures, which are based in part on the positivity rate, it also gives county health officials no way to track, isolate and respond to positive cases.

"If (rapid tests are) the only testing happening in a county, you can have positive cases with a zero percent positive rate," he said.

According to OHA's data, Grant County had a total of 31 positive cases last month when the county saw roughly 95% of its 142 infections.

Sarah Poe, Malheur County's public health administrator and public health information officer, said most health care providers in rural

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VACCINES COMING

Doses expected for Grant County health, long-term care workers this month

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As the state prepares to receive an expected 267,400 COVID-19 vaccine doses by the end of the year, Grant County will receive doses for health care workers and long-term care facility staff and residents around mid-December, according to Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay.

The vaccine, which is taken in two doses, will be distributed over a four-week span. The vaccines, made by Pfizer, must be kept at -94 degrees Fahrenheit and can be stored in a refrigerator for up to five days, according to the company's website.

The hospitals, she said, will administer vac-



Eagle file photo

Grant County Health Department Clinic Manager Jessica Winegar demonstrates how a COVID-19 test is administered during a session of Grant County Court last month.

cines to their own staff while federal pharmacy partners will administer to the care facilities.

Blue Mountain Hospital Emergency Services Director Rebekah Rand said the hospital has started the process to become a vaccine provider, but as of Friday, they do not know when they will begin administering the vaccine.

"We are taking direction from the Oregon Authority as they will drive every step of the process," she said. "There are certain steps that must be taken as an organization to administer any COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available, so like many other hospitals in Oregon, (the hospital district) has started working on that process but because of the factors including

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BY THE NUMBERS

Grant County reported five new COVID-19 cases since Dec. 2, bringing the county's total number to 142.

The Oregon Health Authority reported Friday that the virus claimed 30 lives — the highest one-day total.

The state is at upwards of 80,000 for total cases and has seen 1,000 deaths since February.

Except for Maine and Hawaii, every state has seen an uptick in corona-

virus cases.

U.S. deaths topped 3,100 on Thursday, the steepest daily toll in the pandemic. As of Friday, the virus has killed 283,568 in the U.S. and 1.5 million worldwide.

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said COVID-19 hospitalizations and intensive care unit patients continue to trend upward with record-high COVID-19 hospitalizations. She said, as of Monday, Grant County's Re-

gion 7, shared with Deschutes, Harney, Klamath, Jefferson, Lake and Wheeler counties, had 72 COVID-19 patients hospitalized.

Lindsay said this is a 20-person increase from Friday's record high. Seventeen of the 72 coronavirus patients are in ICU care, and eight people are on ventilators.

Region 7, according to Lindsay, has five ICU beds available. She said 160 ICU beds are available in the state.

"These disheartening numbers are consistent with national trends," Lindsay said.

While county health officials comment on regional hospitalization capacity, both the health department and the hospital have declined to comment on intensive care patients' specifics, COVID-19 hospitalizations, the severity of symptoms and non-identifying demographics occurring in Grant County to protect patient privacy.

COVID-19 fallout: Tenants living without water

Some now resorting to Canyon Creek to flush their toilets



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
Boring Properties has not paid utility bills for several properties in John Day, resulting in an accumulation of trash and the water being shut off.

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

It's been two weeks since at least two tenants in John Day have been able to bathe.

The impacts of COVID-19 have spread beyond those infected: Oregon Gov. Kate Brown issued an executive order prohibiting evictions for nonpayment of rent during the pandemic, but a local landlord has stopped paying the utilities on the property because the tenant stopped paying rent.

The city of John Day shut off water service to several rentals owned by Boring Properties LLC just before Thanksgiving because the company owes the city more than \$2,700 in past due utility fees, City Manager Nick Green said.

The city was scheduled to discuss the property past press time at a city council meeting Dec. 8, determining whether water services should be restored at a loss to the city and to what extent the

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
Sean McGee of John Day said he gets water from Canyon Creek so he can flush his toilet after the city shut off water to his rental property when the landlord stopped paying utilities.