

Only four new COVID-19 cases reported in the last week

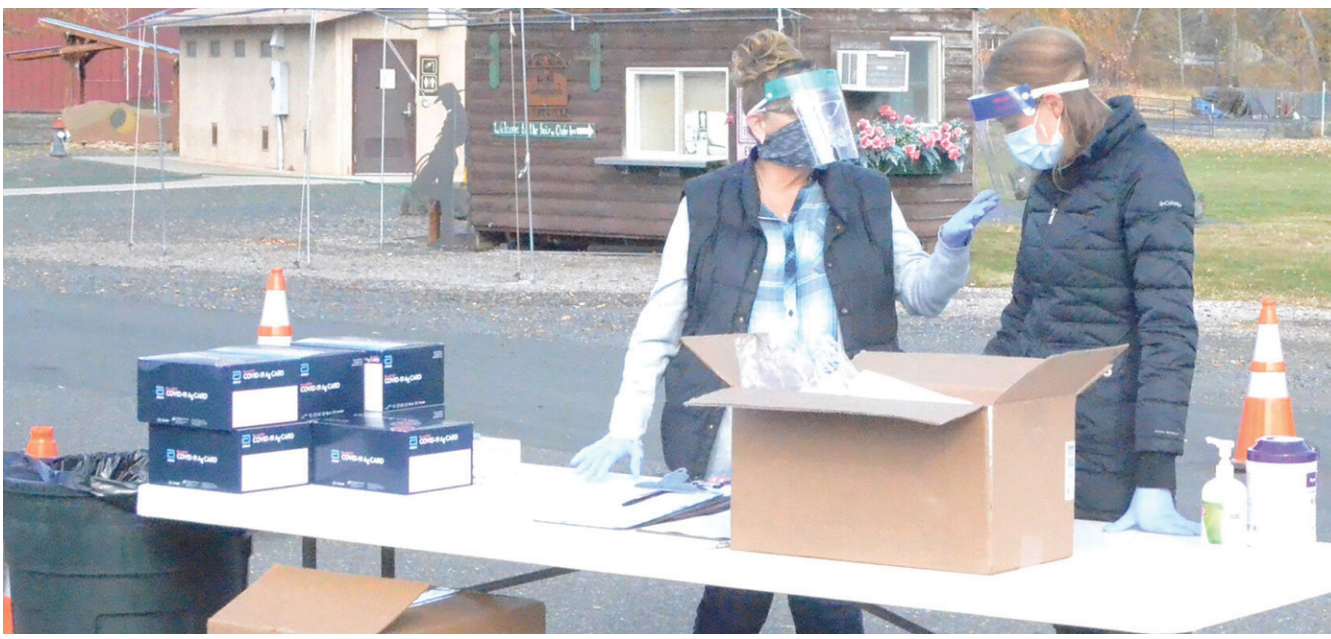
Statewide, 14,500 vaccines have been administered

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County reported just four COVID-19 cases since last Wednesday, according to the county's health department. The county will remain in the lower-risk level, which allows the most activities.

As of Dec. 28, the Oregon Health Authority reported that in Grant County's Region 7, shared with Deschutes, Harney, Klamath, Jefferson, Lake and Wheeler counties, 54 COVID-19 patients are being hospitalized.

According to OHA's report, 12 of those people were in intensive care units while seven were on ven-



Grant County Health Department staff prepare for people to pull up to curbside testing at the fairgrounds.

Eagle file photo

tilators. Four staffed ICU beds are available while 79 non-ICU hospital beds are

available. At St. Charles Hospital in Bend, 29 COVID-19

patients are being hospitalized as of Dec. 28. Eight of the COVID-19 patients are

in the ICU, and five are on ventilators. St. Charles reported

that, as of Dec. 28, they had administered 1,050 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines.

Statewide, 14,524 vaccines have been given. In neighboring Baker County, OHA reports that 64 people have received the vaccine while Malheur County has vaccinated 95 people as of Monday.

On Monday, there were 1,416 new and presumptive cases reported in the state, and nearly 110,000 total positive COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, according to OHA.

State health officials reported five deaths Sunday and no deaths on Dec. 26.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the total number of cases nationwide since Jan. 21 is just over 19 million — up by roughly 145,000 infections.



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U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, answers questions from Grant County community members during a town hall in 2019 at Prairie City School.

Wyden: Stimulus bill funds broadband, assistance for farmers, ranchers

Telehealth and unemployment benefits also included

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Rural Americans will see benefits from the recent stimulus bill.

The bill includes broadband funding and support for low-income families as well as telehealth funding and assistance for farmers and ranchers, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said in a conference call with reporters Dec. 21.

Wyden said the the broadband section of the stim-

ulus package includes \$7 billion to help fund broadband internet access. This would also help provide \$50 a month to low-income families to help pay for internet services, which Wyden wrote into the package.

"We've got a lot of kids trying to learn with less than stellar connectivity," Wyden said.

Wyden said the bill includes a provision, which he wrote with Sen. Chuck Grassley, to provide assistance to farmers and ranchers. Principally, \$13 billion in funding will be provided for agriculture assistance, and expenses paid with the paycheck protec-

tion program loans will be tax-deductible.

"The farmers will be able to buy food and feed and electricity and help ranchers who suffered losses during the pandemic," Wyden said. "... The ag provisions, I think, are very important."

Wyden said the stimulus bill also includes money focused on telehealth. He also said it's important that people can see a doctor whether it be in person or not.

"I think we all know you can't have rural life without rural health care, so it is a quality of life issue, particularly with folks who are elderly," Wyden said.

The stimulus bill passed on Dec. 20 includes a \$600 stimulus check and \$300 in enhanced unemployment benefits. However, Wyden said what he worked on previously was a package that was twice this size.

Wyden said in the spring, he wrote the law that provided four months of extra unemployment insurance, an extra \$600 each week, for four months.

"In Oregon, you might make \$350, \$375 on unemployment..." Wyden said. "Get the extra \$300, that's \$675. Maybe you get the stimulus check. It's pretty hard for a family of four to get by on that."



EOMG file photo

Gov. Kate Brown announced new rules for opening schools last week.

Gov. Brown changes course with re-opening of schools

Previous directives optional if schools take safety precautions

By Teresa Carson
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown abruptly announced new rules for school re-openings Dec. 23, making former directives optional and allowing districts to open if they follow safety precautions.

In a letter to health and education agencies, she said "effective Jan. 1, 2021, Oregon's COVID-19 Health Metrics for Returning to In-Person Instruction will become advisory rather than mandatory. Moving forward, the decision to resume in-person instruction must be made locally, district by district, school by school."

In an effort to tamp down the COVID-19 pandemic, most Oregon schools have been closed since mid-March and students have been learning remotely in their homes. Many parents and students had become increasingly frustrated with the situation and the calls for reopening schools had become more strident as the months wore on.

The situation was complicated by resistance from some teachers unions. Some teachers are at high risk for COVID-19 or have high-risk people in their households.

Schools had been closed and the parameters for re-opening were complicated and changed several times. They also were more stringent in Oregon than most other states.

The Dec. 23 announcement was made as school districts were out on winter break and most administrators were not available for comment.

The announcement said the goal of the new policy is "putting more school districts on track to return students to in-person instruction especially elementary students, by Feb. 15."

The Oregon Education Association immediately issued a statement slamming Brown's announcement.

"Today's decision by Gov. Brown will only result in an increasingly disparate patchwork of return plans throughout the state's public education system — creating uncertainty in a moment when clarity has never been more crucial," the association wrote.

Wishing you the Peace and Joy of the Christmas Season. Best wishes for 2021 from your friends at Eastern Oregon Realty.

Jerry, Michal, Lindsey, Traci, Deann, and Jo

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THE JUNIPER ARTS COUNCIL / GRANT COUNTY CULTURAL COALITION IS SEEKING GRANT PROPOSALS FOR OREGON CULTURAL TRUST GRANT AWARDS

The coalition has \$7,000 from the Oregon Cultural Trust to distribute in Grant County to organizations for projects relating to culture and / or heritage.

Applications are available from Karin Bantish, 131 W. Main Street, John Day, Oregon, or call Kris Beal at (541)932-4892 for more information or an application.

Grant applications will be accepted until January 8, 2021 5 P.M.

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