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Slowing the rollout

Grant County fights to be able to distribute vaccines to at-risk people after state told them to wait a month while it determined who should receive them

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A hundred COVID-19 vaccines won't be sitting unused on a shelf in Grant County for a month after all.

The Grant County Health Department received word Monday afternoon that it can proceed with vaccinations after being told last week to stop distributions for up to a month while the state determined who should be included in the next vaccination group, according to Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay.

Ahead of most of the state, Grant

County has already completed most of Phase 1a of the vaccination rollout, getting shots into the arms of health care providers and long-term care facility employees and residents who wanted them. County educators are scheduled to receive their doses this week in Phase 1b.

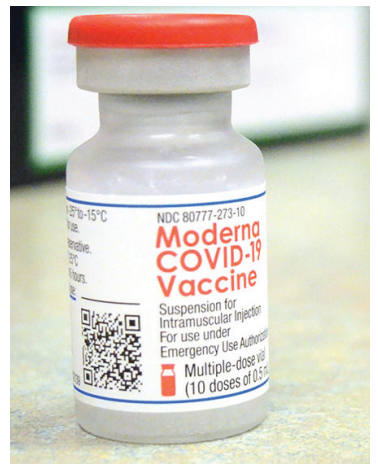
Lindsay said a state health official told her last week they did not want to slow the health department down in getting the vaccine to more people, and as long as they vaccinated educators first, they could move on to get the vaccine to people in other at-risk groups, including people 65 and older and those with significant medical issues.

However, a quick call to the state for guidance on whether grocery store workers qualified as food workers to be included in Phase 1b stopped the progress.

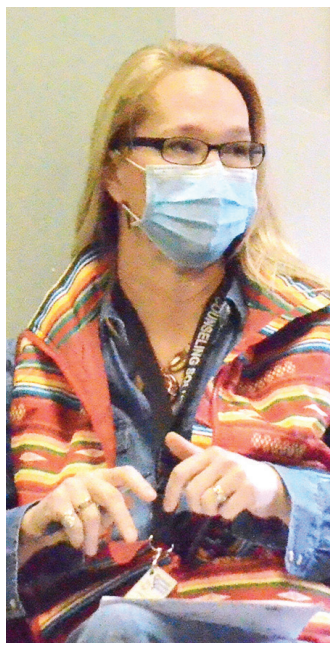
Lindsay said the state sent her a notice not to vaccinate others beyond the educators because other counties lack the supply to immunize beyond Phase 1a and Grant County "must keep the pace with other counties."

She said she was told the Vaccine Advisory Committee needs to define Phase 1b more clearly and prioritize

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The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
A vial of the Moderna vaccine sits on a counter Monday at the Grant County Health Department.



Eagle file photo
Kimberly Lindsay, Grant County public health administrator, during a session of Grant County Court in November.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



Eagle file photo
Denise Porter and Jennifer Garinger of Long Creek School receive grants from the Juniper Arts Council. School officials have gone to great lengths to provide distance learning in Monument, which has minimal broadband access.

Long Creek School purchases iPads, data plans, cell boosters for distance learning without broadband

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Distance learning isn't easy — especially without high-speed internet.

But Long Creek School District has overcome the hurdles to provide a consistent education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After purchasing iPads with cellular data plans for all of the students and installing cell signal boosters, the school is now able to provide comprehensive distance learning.

Long Creek School Office Manager Jennifer Garinger said, distance learning came with a learning curve, but the year has been going well. Early on, the school board and teachers were concerned about having to shift between in-person and online classes during the school year, so they focused only on preparing for online coursework.

"We found this power in the fact that we know this is what we're doing," Garinger said. "We don't have to have lesson plans in case we're in person or online. We are dedicated to this one model, and it allows us to overcome

the (distance learning) hurdles. ... Maybe this wouldn't have worked at a different district, but for us, it works."

With minimal broadband, the school district purchased iPads with data plans because they rely on cellular towers for online usage to provide a more stable connection to online programs.

"Data works better in Long Creek," Garinger said. "It's still not good, but it's way better than internet."

Garinger said getting the iPads and setting them up for students was a process. Each iPad needed software that monitored usage and blocked students from harmful websites.

Students then went to the school in groups to be trained on how to use the tablets for classes.

The iPads were not ready at the beginning of the school year, so most work was originally done through packets. Students and teachers worked together in the warmer weather at the beginning of the school year

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Eagle file photo
Monument Superintendent/Principal Laura Thomas.

Monument School shifts to distance learning

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Thirty-one people in Grant County have tested positive for COVID-19 since Jan. 5.

The jump in cases in Monument led school district officials to move students to distance learning "out of an abundance of caution," according to Monument School District Superintendent Laura Thomas. Two cases were confirmed at the school, and another case was "presumptive."

Kimberly Lindsay, Grant County public health administrator, said the the school district and the community had been proactive about working with the health department.

"There was a good awareness and understanding on the school's part," she said.

The health department offered drive-up testing in the Monument School parking lot on Tuesday past press time.

As of Jan. 11, the county has had 190 COVID-19 infections and remains in the lower risk category.

According to an Oregon Health Authority report, the number of people being hospitalized due to COVID-19 in the county's Region 7 is at 46 as of Friday. The report stated that six people with COVID-19 were in an intensive care unit, and five were on ventilators.

At St. Charles Hospital in Bend, 36 COVID-19 patients are being hospitalized as of Monday. Seven of the COVID-19 patients are in the ICU, and five are on ventilators.

St. Charles reported they had given 4,493 vaccines.

On Monday, there were 939 new and presumptive cases reported in the state, and upwards of 126,000 total positive COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, according to OHA.

State health officials reported 10 new deaths Monday.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the total number of cases nationwide since Jan. 21 is just over 22 million.



Eagle file photo
Long Creek School is 'front and center' for the community.