

Vaccines

Continued from Page A1

those groups. Lindsay said she spoke with Muriel Brown, a committee member, and Gov. Kate Brown told her that those decisions could be months out.

Lindsay said she offered to send the extra doses back to Oregon Health Authority, but OHA told her to hold on to the shots. After vaccinating the county's educators, that would have left roughly 100 doses unused.

"I am very frustrated," she said. "We are working hard to get the vaccines out to people."

The state knew the vaccines were coming in July or August, and Lindsay said the committee should have begun meeting in October.

According to OHA's daily COVID-19 email, the VAC met for the first time on Jan. 7 and discussed how they would prioritize critical workers and other populations.

In an email last week regarding when the VAC would decide on how to prioritize grocery store workers, Communications Director Jonathan Modie said he did not know.

"It's important to remember that the committee will be meeting through February," Modie said. "But we hope to start seeing sequencing decisions by the committee by the end of this month."

VACCINE ROLLOUT

Phase 1a

Group 1: Hospital and health care workers and urgent care clinics. Nursing home workers and emergency medical providers and other first responders.

Group 2: Both staff and residents at long-term-care facilities and congregate care centers, including volunteers.

Group 3: Outpatient settings serving specific high-risk groups; in-home care; day treatment services; non-emergency medical transport.

Group 4: Health care workers in outpatient settings, including drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities.

Phase 1b

Group 1: Educators and other staff at schools.

Group 2: Food and ag service workers.

Group 3: Transportation service workers, including senior rideshare services and medical shuttle services.

Fortunately for Grant County residents who want the vaccine, with the new direction provided Monday, the health department can continue working to provide the vaccine to those at greatest risk.

'It is a mess and absolutely not okay'

Lindsay said Monday, while she does not regret making the call to OHA to get more clarity on grocery store workers and retail employees, the state would have been none the wiser about the county's plans to vaccinate the broader demographics had she not made the call.

It underscores the inconsistent communication and chang-

ing or rules that have plagued the vaccine rollout from the start, she said.

"They have changed the criteria for who gets the vaccine and when no less than six times in the past four weeks. I appreciate that they want to ensure that all minority groups are heard in the vaccine rollout, but while they are going through the listening process, at-risk people who want the vaccine are not able to get it," she said. "Some will die."

She said a rural county like Grant County has a higher percentage of at-risk people with limited access to health care.

"The state has doses available," she said. "It is a mess and absolutely not okay."

"THE STATE HAS DOSES AVAILABLE. IT IS A MESS AND ABSOLUTELY NOT OKAY."

—Kimberly Lindsay, Grant County public health administrator

On Friday, Harney County Health Department posted the following on its Facebook page: "We have several doses left. First come, first serve 75 and over."

Harney County Public Health Administrator Nic Calvin said the county had been vaccinating the people it could.

"We are just trying to roll out the vaccine as quickly as possible," he said. "We're still waiting on the state to come out with Phase 1b, but frankly right now, we can't wait weeks and weeks on end, while we have people dying in our community."

Difficulties and changes

Law enforcement was originally included in Phase 1a, but they were later "bumped" to Phase 1b after the health department had offered and provided them vaccinations, Lindsay said.

She said the county also received permission from the Oregon Health Authority to share the health department's doses with care center residents. According to Lindsay, they were looking at a three-month delay until Walgreens and Rite Aid could get their doses to them.

Lindsay said the health department has 10 vials, and within each vial, there are 10 to 11 doses with a six-hour window to administer the shots after opening a vial.

Lindsay said people have changed their minds at the last minute or failed to show up on more than one occasion.

"It's a little frustrating, and you don't want to waste doses," Lindsay said. "I don't want to be reporting back to the state that we used 70 and dumped 30, especially when there are 30 people out there that you know that want it."

On a couple of occasions, she said they have called people on the waiting list to avoid dumping doses out.

She would not provide the number but said some doses have spoiled due to no shows and last-minute refusals.

Refusal rates

As of Monday, 142 vaccines have been administered in Grant County, 87 by the health department which received 200, and 55 by the hospital which received 100 doses that can only be used for hospital employees.

Although one reason Grant

County so quickly completed Phase 1a was because of high refusal rates, Lindsay said the people who want vaccines in the priority groups have been able to get them quickly.

"We are getting it to the people that want the vaccine quicker than other counties because of the refusal rate," Lindsay said. "Our doses are lasting longer."

Lindsay estimated that between 60-70% of those in the first phase turned down the vaccine.

She said it is likely that Phase 1b's acceptance rate will be similar to those in the previous phase.

"We could have a high acceptance rate with educators and food service workers," she said. "I don't know."

She said she is not surprised to see higher refusal rates in rural Oregon.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends continuing restrictions until the vaccination rate reaches 70-80%, Lindsay said, and she expects the refusal rate will decrease over time.

"They will grow more comfortable and see there are no long-term side effects or babies born with health concerns," she said. "Before we relax public health measures, it's the vaccination rate we look at to be safe."

Learning

Continued from Page A1

to find ways to enhance learning.

"Our teachers were going to public places outdoors and meeting with students with the masking and social distancing," Garinger said. "They would meet at the park once a week with the high school and junior high kids or some porches, on front yards and things like that."

Some students also came up to the school building and sat on the sidewalk to use the internet.



Staff at Long Creek School receive instruction on how to carry out distance learning through iPads.

"It was a strange setup, but it worked," Grainger said. "It worked for our kids

while we got these iPads ready to deploy." Garinger said it was per-

fect timing because the iPads were ready when the weather cooled down and made out-



Contributed photo Long Creek students, from left, Aaron Garinger, Tucker Garinger, Nolan Garinger and Khoa Vuong receive instruction from Long Creek educational aid Linda Studdt-mann about using iPads for classes.

nection and unity."

Garinger said parents have been supportive and teachers have adapted well to the new format.

"They know it's distance learning, and this is what we're doing," Garinger said. "Even if it requires all kinds of work around, they know this is the way the school year will be, and they always help out as much as they can."

"COVID is terrible and tough, but I think Long Creek has shown its strength through COVID. It showed Long Creek's dedication to each other and the community at large. In the end, we will all be fine."

door education difficult.

Even with the iPads, though, many households did not have a great cellular signal. To overcome the new hurdle, the school purchased every family in the district a cell signal booster.

"Every family in our district now has optimized cellular service for education," Garinger said. "It's going to work and help us get through the rest of this year, allowing our students to have the con-

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Happy New Year!
Here's hoping that 2021 will bring good health and happiness to all of you!

We start the new year with anticipation and hope that things will be better. 2020 ended with some positive things happening in Grant County. We had a record year for our Grant County Greenback program! I have been redeeming them like crazy! This has kept a lot of money here and encouraged people to "Shop Local" this holiday season.

Our Greenback program started in 2015 and it is still going strong. Greenbacks do not expire. If you are a Chamber member and you are not currently accepting Greenbacks but want to, give me a call or stop by the Chamber office and I will get you set up.

This year's Timber Trucker's Light parade was better than ever! The message "Grant County Strong" was shared by more than 25 beautifully decorated vehicles.

The Chamber has other programs too. Don't forget about the Transient Room Tax Grant program and our Business Enhancement Grant program. Guidelines and applications are available on our website or you can pick them up at our office.

Applications are accepted every month. The Chamber Board of Directors will be meeting on Thursday, January 21st at 10:30 am at the Chamber office.

Best wishes in the New Year.
Tammy Bremner
Chamber Manager

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