

Two COVID-19 deaths in two days doubles county death toll

County reports deaths of Grant County women, 63 and 87, last week

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

COVID-19 killed two Grant County residents in two days last week.

On Thursday, the Grant County Health Department reported the COVID-19-related death of a 63-year-old Grant County woman with underlying conditions, who died at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend on March 23. Friday, the health department reported the COVID-19-related death of an 87-year-old Grant County woman who had underlying conditions as well.

Meanwhile, according to the health department, 11 more people in the county tested positive for the virus.

Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said, while the county is not seeing a virus variant, the strain of COVID-19 the county is seeing is particularly potent.

"This strain that we have of COVID is robust," she said. "It is for me potentially the most robust that I've seen. Clearly, we've seen more deaths, and I've seen more people need to access the emergency room."

Lindsay said that it is not the only strain in the county, and she cannot tell why this version of the virus is causing more severe illnesses.

"I can't say why," Lindsay told the Eagle. "But it is. And so to that end, I think that it behooves all of Grant County to not let their guard down."

Underlying conditions

Lindsay responded to criticism the health department faced over stating the deaths were "COVID-19-related."

She said noting someone's underlying conditions — which could be almost anything from diabetes to high blood pressure — is not a judgment on why or how the person died.

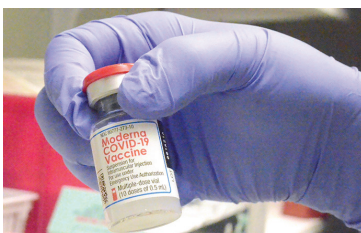
"Because none of them could be fully ruled out, we have to state that there were underlying medical conditions," she said.

To illustrate the point, she said if someone with high blood pressure were to die from an infection caused by an ingrown toenail, they would list high blood pressure as an underlying medical condition.

"Underlying medical conditions can't be ruled out as contributors," she said. "I'm not saying that I agree or disagree, but if there are underlying medical conditions, it has to be stated."

County leaders weigh in on an uptick in cases

County Judge Scott Myers said whether people believe that COVID-19 is real or not, they should be concerned about what will happen to businesses, public offices and the day-to-day operations of the county should positive cases continue to increase.



Eagle file photo
A vial of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

"The downside of not taking the pandemic seriously is what happens if we keep getting positives," he said.

Myers said restaurants and public buildings would have to close if the county continues to see a spike in cases.

County Commissioner and Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher said the virus is real and affects people differently.

Hamsher said it does not just affect the elderly. He said he has seen middle-aged people have severe health issues with it.

"If you have existing medical conditions, it can be severe and deadly for you," he said.

Hamsher said that vulnerable populations are affected by any infectious disease — flu or the coronavirus — and can produce disastrous consequences when they spread to a nursing home, as was the case earlier this month.

Hamsher said he is waiting to get the vaccine since he was in close contact with someone who tested positive for the virus.

"They recommend you wait 90 days if you've had it or been

in close contact because you have those antibodies, and the vaccine fights with those antibodies," he said.

For his part, Myers said he got the vaccine the day he became eligible.

He said the only hesitancy he had in getting the vaccine would have been if there had been a shortage of doses and there were older adults who wanted them. He said he would have stepped aside.

"I just thought, with my contact with other people, the public and family, I needed not to be susceptible to getting it and carrying it to someone else," Myers said.

County Commissioner Sam Palmer did not respond to the Eagle's request for comment.

Vaccine update

Lindsay said Monday the county received 200 new vaccine doses and 100 booster shots.

She said the county vaccinated people in eligible groups who the health department had previously scheduled and others on the Grant County waitlist.

Lindsay said the health department would hold a Johnson & Johnson single-shot vaccine event from 10-11 a.m. April 7 at Seneca City Hall. She said another event is being planned on April 8 in Monument, Dayville and Long Creek.

To join the vaccine waitlist, email vaccine@ccsemail.org with name, date of birth, phone number, address and any chronic health conditions. If unable to email, call 541-575-0429.

No signs of foul play in Long Creek fire investigation

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A woman's death in a house fire near Long Creek that was being investigated as arson has not turned up any evidence of foul play so far, according to Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley.

In August, the body of Susan Carter, 72, was discovered inside her mobile home on Carter Lane near Long Creek after it became engulfed in flames, then-Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said in a press release.



Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley

The sheriff's office received a report of the burning home at about 5 a.m. on Aug. 3, and both the Long Creek fire department and ambulance were dispatched to the scene. The sheriff's office and Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office also responded.

During a subsequent investigation, authorities learned that Carter had gone to the Pendleton area the previous week and returned home on Saturday.

Members of the state fire marshal's office and an arson investigator with the Oregon State Police began an investigation into the fire's cause when Carter was located in the burned home.

McKinley said the investigation is ongoing.

COPS AND COURTS

Arrests and citations in the Blue Mountain Eagle are taken from the logs of law enforcement agencies. Every effort is made to report the court disposition of arrest cases.

Grant County Circuit Court

David E. Hall, 26, pleaded guilty March 25 to a count of delivery of methamphetamine committed on Feb. 23. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail and three years of supervised probation.

Grant County Sheriff

The Grant County Sheriff's Office reported the following for the week of March 24:

- Concealed handgun licenses: 11
- Average inmates: 7
- Bookings: 3
- Releases: 5
- Arrests: 0
- Citations: 0
- Fingerprints: 5
- Civil papers: 6
- Warrants processed: 2
- Assistance/Welfare check: 1
- Search and Rescue: 1

Grant County Justice Court

Violation of the basic rule: Tegan J. Hulsey, 25, Madras, March 12, 80/55 zone, fined \$265; Edward J. Miltner, 41, Boise, Idaho, Feb. 15, 71/55 zone, fined \$140; Robert D. Marsh, 26, Canyon City, Feb.

26, 84/55 zone, fined \$265.

Exceeding speed limit: Brady A. Sherburn, 18, Princeton, June 13, 58/35 zone, fined \$265; John E. Guthridge, 57, Burns, March 3, 55/35 zone, fined \$165; Austin L. Sommers, 25, Naples, Idaho, Dec. 29, 90/65 zone, fined \$440; Ronald L. Weed, 79, Kennewick, Washington, March 2, 85/65 zone, fined \$265; Paul D. Luscomb, 48, Herriman, Utah, March 2, 71/60 zone, fined \$115.

Driving while suspended: Tyler J. Gifford, 26, John Day, Feb. 17, fined \$440.

Driving uninsured: John E. Guthridge, 57, Burns, July 13, fined \$265, Feb. 6, fined \$265, Feb. 22, fined \$265.

Failure to carry proof of insurance: John E. Guthridge, 57, Burns, March 3, fined \$265.

Operating vehicle while using mobile device: Hannah Mae Deming, 24, Mt. Vernon, March 2, fined \$265, fine suspended upon completion of distracted driving course.

Obstruction of vehicle windows: David W. Davis, 64, John Day, March 12, fined \$115.

Delbert L. Snode pleaded guilty March 15 to a count of second-degree disorderly conduct. He was sentenced to 18 months of probation, 60 hours of community service and ordered to pay \$700 in fines and fees and \$500 in compensation.

On March 24, the court granted a judgment for CSO Financial Inc. against Gary W. Moulton for \$4,047.51.

Oregon State Police

March 21: Oregon State Police stopped a vehicle for a traffic violation near milepost 174 on Highway 26. The driver, Talia C. Gilliam, 44, had a misdemeanor warrant out of Grant County Justice Court for failure to appear on a traffic offense. The driver was cited in lieu of custody for the warrant.

March 22: A state trooper investigated a minor-injury, single motor vehicle crash on Highway 395B, near milepost 98. The driver fell asleep and the vehicle traveled onto the gravel shoulder of the north bound lane. The driver woke up and overcorrected, losing control of the vehicle. The vehicle traveled back across the highway, leaving the roadway on the shoulder of the southbound lane. The driver traveled through a barbed wire fence, striking a large post and gate, coming to rest pointed toward the west. The driver, Jeffrey Parolini, 26, was issued a citation for careless driving with accident involved. Parolini's insurance company called Frontier Towing to respond.

March 23: A 28-year-old woman had been repeatedly contacted by a 28-year-old man over the past year while

awaiting trial on an assault charge. Two reports have already been sent to the Grant County District Attorney for a charging decision on the prior violations of the no contact order by the 28-year-old man.

March 24: A state trooper stopped a known suspended driver on Highway 26 near milepost 168. The trooper contacted the driver, Adrian L. Couey, 36, who claimed to not know she was suspended despite having eight active suspensions and eight pending suspensions. Couey had no proof of insurance. The trooper previously cited Couey for driving while suspended as has John Day Police Department several times. The trooper issued Couey citations for driving while suspended and driving uninsured. The trooper impounded the vehicle, and Frontier Towing took possession of the vehicle. Couey got a ride from the scene from a friend.

March 24: OSP stopped a vehicle for speed near milepost 175 on Highway 26. The driver showed signs of impairment and consented to Standardized Field Sobriety Tests. After SFSTs, the driver, Courtney G. Wildeboer, 28, of Portland was arrested for driving under the influence of intoxicants—drug and taken to the Grant County Jail where she was lodged for probation

violation. The driver's friend took possession of the car.

March 25: A state trooper stopped a vehicle near milepost 161 on Highway 26 for speeding. When conducting a records check of the driver, his license returned as stolen. Investigation revealed the driver's pickup had been stolen in Portland multiple times, and his wallet with his driver's license was inside the vehicle once when it was stolen. When the vehicle was recovered, the driver did not notify the Portland Police Bureau that he recovered his wallet and license. Dispatch coordinated with the Portland Police Bureau to have the record removed from LEDS/NCIC.

Dispatch

John Day dispatch worked 145 calls during the week of March 22-28, including:

John Day Police Department

March 24: Received a report of theft of service from a gas station.

March 25: Received a report of fraud on East Main Street.

March 26: Advised of a stolen vehicle involved in pursuit out of Malheur County.

March 27: Cited Somer Lee Robinson, 32, of Dayville for driving while suspended, uninsured and failure to carry and present on Highway 26 near milepost 160.

Oregon State Police

March 26: Advised of an injured deer on Highway 26 near Dayville.

Grant County Sheriff's Office

March 24: Received a report of theft on Highway 26 near milepost 173.

March 26: Zachary T. Tschanz, 26, of Redmond was cited for speeding on Highway 26 near milepost 131.

March 26: Responded to a domestic/unwanted subject report along with JDPD at North Johnson Avenue. Robert L. Crosby II, 34, of Prairie City was arrested.

March 27: Responded to a report of theft on Highway 19.

John Day ambulance

March 22: Responded for an elderly woman with difficulty breathing on Valley View Drive.

March 26: Responded for a 74-year-old woman who had fallen on Northeast Seventh Avenue.

Long Creek ambulance

March 22: Along with John Day ambulance, dispatched for an elderly man with difficulty breathing on Ridge Road.

March 22: Along with OSP, GCSO and John Day ambulance, dispatched to a vehicle crash on Highway 395 near Fox.

Monument ambulance

March 27: Along with John Day ambulance, responded for a 69-year-old man with convulsions on Highway 19.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Strawberry Mountain Law, PC
206 S. Humbolt Street • Canyon City, OR 97820
541-575-5750 • office@strawberrymountainlaw.com
• Criminal Law • Family Law • Wills & Probate • Notary Public

Kati Dunn, Kyra Rohner, Greg Goebel, Thomas Boone, Fianna MacGregor-Whitman, Marcus Oatman

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