



Eagle file photo

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay

Free, drop-in vaccinations continue this week

Variants may be leading to case increases

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

With the state opening up access to the COVID-19 vaccine for anyone 16 and older, Oregon Health Authority kicked off its drop-in Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine clinics Tuesday at the Grant County Fairgrounds.

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said OHA would continue to administer the Pfizer vaccine at these clinics from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 28, from noon to 7 p.m. April 29 and April 30 and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 1 in the parking lot of the Grant County Fairgrounds. No appointments are necessary for the free shots.

Lindsay said she hopes people will take advantage of the opportunity.

Last week, she said the health department administered 59 new doses and 133 booster shots.

Grant County's COVID-19 case and vaccination rates are showing signs of improve-

ment. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the county has inoculated 24.8% of the population. Meanwhile, the infection rate over the last week is 416.72 per 100,000 people, down from 1,644 per 100,000 people from April 4-17.

Lindsay told the Eagle that people who get the vaccine do not have to quarantine if the health department identifies them as a close contact. Lindsay said people who are close contacts are asked to quarantine now for 14 days. She said this changed with the spike in cases.

Lindsay said the health department would handle contact tracing in the county from now on. She said the state helped the health department with contact tracing last week and could only reach roughly 40% of the contacts. Lindsay told the Eagle that people may not have picked up the calls because they were not from a local number. She said the health department is back to its typical 90% response rate.

Variants of concern?

While the infection rate is down from where it was, Lindsay said the county is

still seeing more people with COVID-19 access the emergency room.

She said the virus is still impacting younger people, and people continue to show more severe symptoms.

All of this, she said, leads her to believe there are more variants at play than the state can verify.

According to OHA, there have been two variants of concern and five variants of interest in Grant County's region seven, which it shares with Deschutes, Harney, Klamath, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake and Wheeler counties.

Lindsay said she did not believe there had been a significant drop in adherence to social distancing requirements in the last six weeks.

"The potential reality for a variant to be contributing to the cases is likely the leading factor," she said. "I just don't believe that it's mostly attributable to COVID fatigue and wanting to let our guard down."

With 121 cases in the last two weeks, Grant County is moving to the extreme risk level Friday, closing indoor dining through at least May 6.

Vaccine voices: Grant County residents share thoughts

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As Grant County residents began to line up to get the COVID-19 vaccine, CASA and Community Counseling Solutions partnered up to talk to people about their reasons for getting the vaccine.

Lindsay Rausch, CASA's wraparound services coordinator, said she and Elise Delgado, an outreach worker with CCS, found that people want to talk and connect. She said they had questions, opinions and experiences around COVID-19 they wanted to share.

"It was enlightening to get beyond the headlines and talking points and hear real people's experiences firsthand," she said.

Rausch said it was "uplifting" as people talked to her about their plans after getting immunized, which included bringing their lives back to a "sense of normalcy," which included being able to travel and see family again.

With permission from those she spoke to, Rausch shared a few of these conversations without any other identifying information except for gender identification, age and initials.

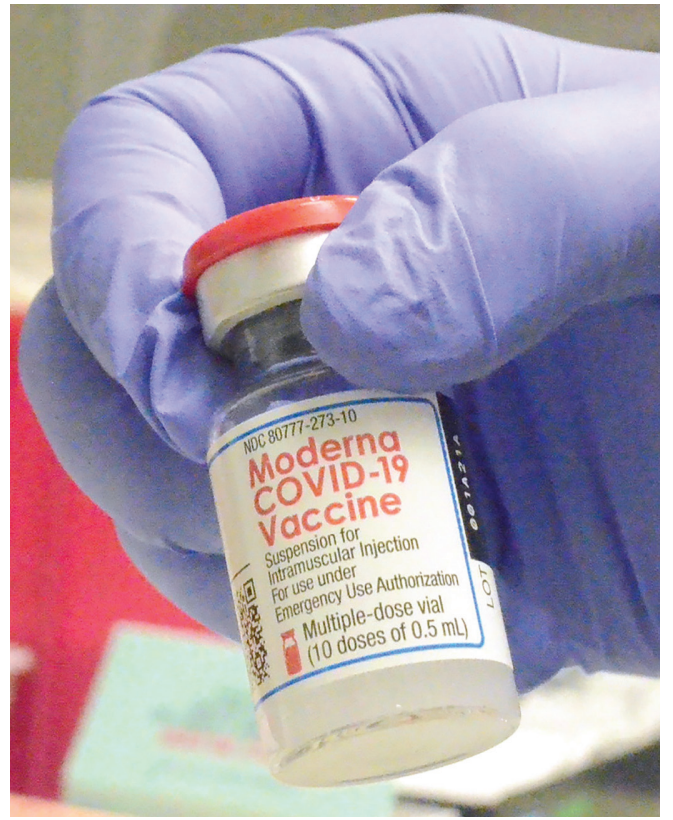
The Eagle only made general references to age and gender for clarity and readability.

From the polio epidemic to the COVID-19 pandemic

A Grant County couple who both lived through the polio epidemic did not hesitate to roll up their sleeves when it was their turn to get the shot.

"I believe our medical professionals know what they're doing," the husband said. "I'm old enough — I went through the polio and smallpox thing. The numbers tell you, this is not a joke."

According to the Mayo Clinic, the polio epidemic



Eagle file photo

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

infected 60,000 children at its height, paralyzed thousands and killed 3,000 people. The U.S. began widespread vaccinations in 1955 and completely eradicated the virus in the U.S. by 1979, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

"Kids died and nobody talked about it. Kids just never came home. If a household had measles, a quarantine notice was put on your door," the wife told Rausch.

Vaccine hesitancy

Rausch said, when she and Delgado set out to talk to people, she wanted to hear from those who were hesitant at first but ultimately decided to get the shot.

A woman in her late 50s initially did not want to get the vaccine.

However, Rausch said she thought about her health issues, a delay in getting surgery, her job around kids and decided to "brave up."

In another situation, a female in her 40s worried at first about severe food aller-

gies, but after speaking with nurses, chose to get it.

'Less likely to get seriously ill'

Rausch said, aside from getting immunized for their health, other reasons were to see friends and family again and to protect others.

"A close second was getting back a sense of freedom and normalcy," she said.

A middle-aged resident said, "I believe that getting vaccinated will make it less likely that I will get seriously ill from COVID-19, so I will continue to be able to take care of my family."

'Maybe my mom needed me to have it'

Rausch said she talked to a woman in her late 50s who dropped by the clinic because of her elderly mother.

"She asked me to," the woman said of her mother. "She told me I should do it. She's very vulnerable, and I'm over a lot. I may not need it, but maybe my mom needed me to have it."

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cornerstonejohnday@gmail.com
ccfjd.org

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