

# Round-Up source of new COVID-19 spike in Umatilla County

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East Oregonian

PENDLETON — What was long a fear among Umatilla County's health care workers appears to be coming true — COVID-19 cases are rising because of the Pendleton Round-Up.

In recent days, local governments and their public health authorities began acknowledging the rodeo was having an effect on the spread of COVID-19. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Board of Trustees on Monday, Sept. 27, ratified a public health emergency declaration made Sept. 24, which was quickly followed by new gathering restrictions.

In a statement, a tribal health official cited Round-Up specifically when talking about a new surge of cases on the reservation.

In an interview, Joe Fiumara, the director of Umatilla County Public Health, said his department has traced nearly 50 cases to Round-Up before admitting a lack of contact tracing cooperation from COVID-19 patients meant the outbreak likely was much larger. The cases stem from venues across the event from Sept. 11 through Sept. 22 and include people who came to the Round-Up

already having COVID-19. "We were dropping ahead of the state," Fiumara said. "I believe they are still dropping. And if we're not now, it doesn't take a whole lot of thought to come up with some reasons why."

Saying the Pendleton Round-Up Association has not seen the case numbers from the tribes or the county, Round-Up General Manager Erika Patton declined to comment.

Rudy Owens, a spokesperson with the Oregon Health Authority, said in an email that the state is offering "assistance to local and tribal health authorities with outbreak investigation, case investigation, testing, and contact tracing."

Last week, Oregon saw a decline in COVID-19 cases for the third straight week. Umatilla County's cases had followed that trend, dropping below 400 weekly cases for the first time in more than a month. But by the end of last week, the county's cases began to tick upward, topping out with the second-highest weekly total since the pandemic began — 505.

### 'Cases have spiked quickly'

Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center recorded 72 new cases last week. In a statement, interim Yellowhawk



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Former Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center CEO Lisa Guzman receives a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine from registered nurse LeAnn Alexander at the health clinic in Mission on Dec. 18.**

CEO Aaron Hines mentioned Round-Up when talking about the surge in new cases.

"This emergency declaration is needed to help protect our community," he said. "We knew that a surge in positive COVID-19 cases was possible following the Pendleton Round-Up. What we've seen from this past week is that the cases have spiked quickly."

While the tribes have largely aligned their COVID-19 rules with the state in recent months, they're hearing the early days of the pandemic by going further in their restrictions. On the same day the tribal trustees declared a public health emergency, the incident command team prohibited social gatherings of six people or more from two different households and capped

attendance at Nixyaawii Community School events at 75.

The CTUIR has organized several mass vaccination events and engaged with tribal members directly about getting the vaccine, but the tribes' 47% vaccination rate remains below its 70% goal.

The board on Sept. 2 announced it was requiring all COVID-19 screeners and staff at Yellowhawk, the Umatilla Tribal Fire Department and the CTUIR Education Department to get vaccinated by Sept. 30. But at the meeting Sept. 27, the board of trustees unanimously voted to extend that deadline to Oct. 31. Unvaccinated staff in those departments will be required to get tested for COVID-19 on a weekly basis and wear a face mask during work hours until then.

Yellowhawk has reported a total of 569 cases and four deaths over the course of the pandemic. Although the agency is seeing a significant number of breakthrough cases, 80% of cases are attributed to non-vaccinated patients.

### Lack of cooperation means inaccurate count

Joe Fiumara, the county's public health director, said the county has traced 49 COVID-19 cases back to Round-Up events so far.

"What's disheartening is that people who had symptoms chose to partake," he said. "That's something people don't seem to understand — if you have symptoms, please stay home."

The Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon took several measures to heed state and local health guidelines and mandates. Contractors and staff were "subject to wear a mask when not actively engaged in the events," and guests over the age of 5 were "requested to wear a mask" if they were not having food or beverages, the organizers said in a Facebook post. The event had hand sanitizer, hand washing stations, medical personnel, ambulance coverage and "increased" medical room size and coverage.

Signs recommending masks were posted through-

out the event. They reminded attendees of the potential risks of COVID-19: "By your participation in the event, you are accepting the potential risk of COVID-19 exposure," the signs said.

But masks were few and far between at the event. And there was no proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 tests required to enter the Round-Up Grounds.

"I was disappointed in the lack of support from the Round-Up staff, volunteers, in showcasing the masking and encouraging the mask-wearing," Fiumara added. "And I'm worried we may be looking at the price we're going to pay for that."

The 49 cases are surely an undercount, Fiumara added. Many attendees who have fallen ill and know others who have are not cooperating with health officials. That means, for now, it is almost impossible for the county to determine how large the outbreak is.

Hines and Fiumara said they were expecting to see a case spike following the Round-Up. But the latest spike is quicker and steeper than they anticipated.

"My concern is that we will end up with more deaths out of this," Fiumara said. "And many of them likely could have been avoided. We don't know how vaccinated the crowd was."

## 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

Toby James Yazzie, 28, was found guilty by a jury on Sept. 21 of a single misdemeanor count of criminal trespass committed on Feb. 3. Yazzie was given one year of probation and ordered to serve three days in jail, with credit for time already served. He was also ordered to pay a \$100 fine. A count of fourth-degree assault was dismissed.

### Grant County Sheriff

The Grant County Sheriff's Office reported the following for the week ending Sept. 22:  
Concealed handgun licenses: 6  
Average inmates: 11  
Bookings: 9  
Releases: 5  
Arrests: 2  
Citations: 5  
Fingerprints: 3  
Civil papers: 11  
Warrants processed: 11  
Assistance/Welfare check: 3  
Search and Rescue: 1

### Grant County Justice Court

The Grant County Justice Court reported the following for the week ending Sept. 22:  
Traffic citations: 21  
Violation crimes: 5  
Misdemeanors: 3  
Small claims/civil: 5

Hearings held: 22  
Persons on probation: 42  
Community service hours: 0  
License suspensions: 0  
To collections/DOR: 0  
Warrants issued: 1

### Oregon State Police

#### Dispatch

John Day dispatch worked 195 calls from Sept. 20-26, including:

- **John Day Police Department**
- **Grant County Sheriff's Office**

Sept. 20: Responded to a road hazard on Highway 26 at milepost 156.

Sept. 20: Responded to a theft report on Ingle Street. The issue was determined to be a civil matter.

Sept. 20: Advised of a theft on Trout Road.

Sept. 20: Received a report of suspicious circumstances on Mountain Boulevard.

Sept. 20: Arrested Nicole Christine Shaffer, 25, on a Grant County Justice Court warrant.

Sept. 20: Responded to a welfare check request on Franklin Street.

Sept. 20: Arrested Melinda Jo Moss, 42, of Mt. Vernon on a Grant County warrant.

Sept. 21: Responded to a theft report at the Wickiup Campground.

Sept. 21: Responded with Oregon State Police to a reported road hazard on Highway 26 at milepost 167.

Sept. 21: Responded to a theft report at the Blue Mountain Works Center.

Sept. 22: Performed a

welfare check on Mountain Boulevard.

Sept. 22: Responded to an animal complaint on Mountain Boulevard.

Sept. 22: Responded to a request for a welfare check on Bridge Street.

Sept. 23: Responded to a report of a deer stuck in a fence near the Kountry Lanes bowling alley.

Sept. 23: Advised of an animal complaint on Millie Way.

Sept. 23: Advised of an animal complaint on Highland Drive.

Sept. 23: Responded with Oregon State Police to a suspicious subject at the Chuck Wagon.

Sept. 23: Initiated a search and rescue operation for an overdue hunter near Scotty Creek Lane.

Sept. 24: Removed a dead animal from Highway 395 South near milepost 8.

Sept. 24: Responded to a report of a suspicious person at Humbolt Elementary School.

Sept. 24: Responded to a report of a deer hit by a vehicle on Bench Road with assistance from the John Day Police Department.

Sept. 24: Arrested Amanda Ellen Wright, 42, of Canyon City on Humbolt Street for violation of a no-contact order.

Sept. 25: Responded to an animal complaint on Millie Way.

Sept. 25: Responded to a theft report on Soaring Eagle.

Sept. 25: Called for an ambulance for a subject having a heart attack on Main Street.

Sept. 25: Responded to a trespassing complaint on Belshaw Creek.

Sept. 25: Arrested Travis Benjamin Farr, 28, of Mt. Vernon on a Grant County warrant.

Sept. 25: Cited Gaylord Talton McLamb, 72, on Humbolt Street for driving while suspended.

Sept. 26: Responded to a phone harassment complaint on Bridge Street.

Sept. 26: Responded to a report of a domestic disturbance on Bridge Street, with assistance from John Day police.

• **John Day Police**  
Sept. 21: Responded to a report of child abuse on Main Street.

Sept. 21: Responded to a report of a suspicious subject at Cornerstone Church.

Sept. 22: Responded to a report of cattle on the roadway at the mill corner.

Sept. 22: Arrested Stewart Dune, 60, of John Day on Canyon Boulevard on an assault charge.

Sept. 22: Performed a welfare check on Second Street.

Sept. 24: Arrested Travis Bryers, 22, on Canyon Boulevard for menacing.

Sept. 24: Arrested Devan James Haynes, 28, of John Day on Main Street on a Grant County warrant.

Sept. 24: Arrested Cody Sasser, 41, of Canyon City on a charge of driving under the influence in the Len's Pharmacy parking lot following a report of a minor crash.

Sept. 25: Cited Ashlie Ruth

Clark, 29, of John Day in an alley off Main Street for driving while suspended and driving uninsured.

Sept. 26: Responded to a request for a welfare check on Elm Street.

• **Oregon State Police**  
Sept. 20: Responded to a report of a deer struck by a vehicle on Highway 26 near Wilderness Road.

Sept. 20: Responded to a report of a cow struck by a vehicle on Highway 26 near milepost 178.

Sept. 21: Assisted John Day police with a welfare check on Seventh Avenue.

Sept. 25: Responded to a report of cattle on the road near Dollar General.

Sept. 25: Responded to a report of trespassing on Highway 19.

Sept. 25: Advised of illegal hunting along highway 26 near milepost 171.

Sept. 25: Advised of shots fired near Indian Creek Road.

• **John Day ambulance**  
Sept. 20: Responded to an injury accident on Highway 26 near milepost 166.

Sept. 20: Responded to a male who fell at Chester's Market.

Sept. 20: Responded to a call for two males on Main Street needing treatment at a care facility.

Sept. 21: Responded to a welfare check request on Hilcrest Drive.

Sept. 22: responded to a medical call on Highway 395 South.

Sept. 22: responded along with Dayville Ambulance

to a motor vehicle crash on County Road 38 near milepost 3.

Sept. 24: Responded to a call from a 38-year-old female feeling sick on Brent Drive.

Sept. 25: Responded to a call about a 90-year-old female with high pulse and blood pressure at Valley View.

Sept. 26: Responded to a medical call on Main Street.

Sept. 26: Responded for an 82-year-old female who had fallen on Eastside Lane.

• **U.S. Forest Service**  
Sept. 24: Responded to a report of a possible forest fire along Forest Service Road 13 near the Short Creek Guard Station.

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Mon-Thurs	7:10
<b>ADDAMS FAMILY 2</b> (PG)	
Friday	4:20, 7:20
Sat & Sun	1:20, 4:20, 7:20
Mon-Thurs	7:20
<b>DEAR EVAN HANSEN</b> (PG-13)	
Friday	4:00 7:00
Sat & Sun	1:00, 4:00, 7:00
Mon-Thurs	7:00

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