

# Vaccine clinic targets Hispanics

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Walking to the door of a recent pop-up COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Hermiston, Maria Ugarte admitted to feeling emotional about getting a shot.

"I'm scared," the Umatilla resident said. "But I'm going to get done with it. I'm going to get the shot."

## Ugarte's story

Initially afraid of how the vaccine would affect her disabled daughter, she and other family members did not get vaccinated. She said she thought her family would not need to be vaccinated, as long as they followed other guidelines. So, they were careful to wear masks, wash their hands and social distance wherever possible, Ugarte said.

And still, the infection reached their home, she said.

She said she got sick and was bedridden for 21 days. Also, her daughter came down with COVID-19, Ugarte said, and she had a bad experience

at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston. The hospital was stretched thin at the time of her daughter's arrival, she said. Ugarte described the hospital as lacking beds and equipment, as other patients were also being treated.

"I thought I had lost her," she said. "Thank God she's OK."

After they recovered, family members started getting vaccinations, she said. Ugarte, herself, got her first Pfizer shot in October. She said she wanted to wait until she was feeling well before getting the necessary second shot. It is only now, she said, that her "foggy brain," fatigue and cough, symptoms of COVID-19, have passed.

"I just want to tell everybody that this thing if freaking real," she said of COVID-19, "and they should be afraid because they can die of it."

## Setting up for the shot

New Horizons drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Hermiston provided its space for the clinic. Center Direc-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian  
Maria Ugarte looks away Friday, Dec. 10, 2021, as she receives her second dose of COVID-19 vaccine from licensed practical nurse Sergio Gonzalez during a vaccine clinic in Hermiston.

tor Jose Garcia greeted Ugarte and welcomed her to fill out paperwork and then get her shot.

This was Garcia's fifth vaccination event at New Horizons, he said. He provided space for health care providers to vaccinate individuals. Meanwhile, he offered visitors air purifiers, hand sanitizer, masks and more. He passed out information about

COVID-19 prevention in English and Spanish. He set out boxes of food, made available by Agape House in Hermiston.

## Looking at the numbers

According to Joseph Fiumara, public health director for Umatilla County Public Health, around 34% of Hispanic people in the county are vaccinated against the coro-

navirus. In contrast, 43% of the county's white population is vaccinated, he said. These numbers may not be precise, he said, because they are from a survey in which Hispanic people were overrepresented.

Another survey, conducted over the phone, showed a higher percentage of Hispanic people than white people are vaccinated, he said, but he was not confident these numbers accurately represents the entire county.

The best numbers, he said, show Hispanic people are less vaccinated than other groups. Still, he said, the county is closing the gap on this difference and more Hispanic people are getting vaccinated.

The director gave reasons for the disparity. For one, he said, the difference between ethnicities in vaccination rate "started that way." The virus hit the Hispanic community very hard, he said, infecting workers in agriculture and food processing, jobs people cannot do at home.

Vaccines during the onset

of their rollout went to hospital workers, first responders and teachers, he said, jobs that tend to have more white people.

There are other barriers to vaccination among Hispanic people, he explained, such as wariness of a new vaccine, distrust of government and a language barrier.

As his department and others have tried to address issues of vaccination among Hispanic people, the difference between ethnic groups is closing, he said. Twenty-four percent of all vaccinations are being given to Hispanic people, who represent 28% of the population, he said.

The director credited the work by community organizations, which have educated individuals and made vaccinations more available than they had in the past. Vaccination events, often staffed by Spanish-speaking people, are taking place. Also, several local businesses have hosted clinics for workers to get vaccinated while remaining on the clock, Fiumara said.

## Storm raises hopes for ski season start

By JAYSON JACOBY  
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BAKER CITY — Winter remains more of a rumor than reality in Baker City, but a weekend storm fulfilled its forecast in the mountains.

And although city dwellers will have to wait to construct the season's first snowman, skiers and snowboarders are getting close to making their first runs at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

The potent storm was a perfect illustration of the rain shadow phenomenon, although in this case the precipitation was generally frozen rather than liquid.

With winds in the upper atmosphere coming from the southwest, the mountains, notably the Elkhorns, intercepted most of the moisture, according to the National Weather Service.

Snow showers fell periodically in Baker City on Saturday, Dec. 11, but

almost none accumulated.

Yet just 10 miles or so to the southwest, on the other windward side of a shoulder of the Elkhorns, the storm dropped a few inches of snow.

And higher in the mountains, much more snow piled up.

Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort reported 13 inches of new snow during the weekend, with a snow base of 18 inches on Monday morning, Dec. 13.

If the weather forecast for the rest of this week proves close to accurate, with snow likely most days, there's a "very, very good chance" that the ski area will open for the season on Saturday, Dec. 18, said Chelsea Judy, Anthony Lakes marketing director.

"We're very optimistic," Judy said on Monday morning, Dec. 13.

An automated snow-measuring station near Bourne, about six miles north of Sumpter,

reported 15 inches of new snow, with 16 inches on the ground Monday morning.

Another station, at Eilertson Meadow along Rock Creek on the east side of the Elkhorns, about 14 inches of snow fell during the weekend. There was only one inch of snow there before the storm.

At Schneider Meadows, in the southern Wallows north of Halfway, about 22 inches of snow fell during the weekend, bringing the total to 31 inches.

The chance for sticking snow in Baker City and other valleys of Baker County will increase this week after a cold front swept through Monday night, ushering in colder air and changing the upper air pattern to northwest, which reduces the rain shadow effect.

The National Weather Service predicts snow to continue in the mountains, with a foot or more during the week in the Anthony Lakes area.



Alaska Airlines/Submitted photo

Alaska Airlines was flying direct from Redmond Airport to Portland, but stopped in November.

## Alaska drops direct flight to PDX

By SUZANNE ROIG  
The Bulletin

REDMOND — For more than a month, Central Oregon travelers have not been able to book a direct flight to Portland.

Alaska Airlines, the carrier for that route, suspended the flights indefinitely starting Nov. 3, leaving the Redmond Airport without any direct connection to Portland.

"The loads have been far below regional average throughout the pandemic," said Cailee Olson, Alaska Airlines media relations manager. "We kept it around, but as demand has picked up elsewhere, (it has not) on this route."

Zachary Bass, Redmond Airport director, said the airline has added direct routes to San Diego, California, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

"They're the only direct to Portland carrier," Bass said. "They'd like to come back, but they're just not sure when."

The airline also has many flights from Redmond to Seattle, where it's based.

Eric Sande, Redmond Chamber of Commerce exec-

utive director, said that the staffing challenges affecting most businesses are also affecting the airlines.

"The suspended flights are expected to resume in the new year, and in the meantime, travelers are having to look at alternative forms of transportation to Portland, or connect through Seattle," Sande said.

In October, the most current month data are available, there were 81,224 passengers arriving and departing at Redmond, compared to the same period in 2020, when there was 43,584, according to data provided by Redmond Airport.

In 2019, before any COVID-19 related travel restrictions were put in place, there were 89,916 passengers arriving and departing in October, according to the airport data.

By comparison, Portland Airport had 203,384 passengers in October.

Redmond Airport has been in discussion with other airlines about providing that service, Bass said. During the past year, the airport has picked up routes to Burbank,

California and the Reno-Tahoe area.

"We're seeing a decrease in flights over the winter," Bass said. "It's a roller coaster time frame with aviation right now. The pilot shortage is a big problem right now. Airlines are making decisions based upon staffing and not route popularity."

Redmond Airport recently drew the attention of Aha!, the leisure brand of ExpressJet Airlines, and Avelo Airlines that offer direct flights, eliminating the need for connections and crowded airport hubs or long drives to larger airports. The new airlines joined Allegiant's return to Redmond in 2019, when it announced it would fly from Redmond Airport to Las Vegas and Mesa, Arizona.

The airport is served by seven airlines providing about 25 flights a day out of Redmond, Bass said. The number of flights tends to fluctuate depending on time of year. Carriers include Aha!, Alaska Airlines, Allegiant Air, American Airlines, Avelo Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines.

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