

Virus

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absence levels, just like they did with a flu outbreak in November.

Scott Goff, fire marshal for Umatilla County Fire District #1, said the fire district’s advice was the same as everyone else’s: wash your hands. He said the district had a call with the Oregon Health Authority scheduled for Wednesday for further discussion on the issue.

“We haven’t really encountered anything on this side of the county yet, but we have done some educating with our folks, and we’re emphasizing for them to use their safety gear,” he said.

Although the county only has one presumptive case so far, on Monday Oregon Health Authority officials said there were likely many more cases going undetected in the state.

The known Umatilla County patient is hospitalized in Walla Walla, they said, and health officials are “moving quickly to contact people who may have been in close contact with the individual who tested as a presumptive positive case.” They are also working to determine where else the patient may have interacted with people in recent days and will notify the public as additional locations are determined.

The case is not linked to travel to a part of the world with known cases of COVID-19, meaning it is considered a case of “community transmission” picked up locally.

The Weston Middle School gym is in a separate building from the rest of the school, and Athena-Weston School District announced it had closed the gym and will conduct a deep cleaning.

Wildhorse Resort and Casino was also closed for cleaning “out of an abundance of caution,” although CTUIR spokesman Chuck Sams said the employee worked in a confined area of the building away from direct contact with the general public. In addition, all community events on the Umatilla Indian Reservation are cancelled for the rest of the week.

Oregon residents who attended Saturday’s basketball game can dial 211 with questions, while Washington residents can call the Washington State Department of Health at 800-525-0127 and press #.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joseph Fiumara said his department was starting to receive calls from people concerned about the virus.

“Our entire public health team is diligently working away at following every link we can, and identifying everybody who is potentially at risk and trying to respond to public requests as they come in,” he said. “But we are being overloaded with calls.”

Dean Sidelinger, the state health officer, also urged caution.

“We know that this dis-

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is coronavirus?

The coronavirus is a family of viruses that cause diseases ranging from a common cold to the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. The coronavirus making the news now is a new strain, discovered on Dec. 31, 2019 in Wuhan, China. It has been labeled COVID-19.

What are the symptoms?

According to the CDC, the main symptoms of COVID-19 are coughing, shortness of breath and fever, which develop between two and 14 days after exposure. Some patients merely experience a mild cough or even no symptoms, while some have experienced difficulty breathing to the point they have required hospitalization or developed pneumonia and other more serious complications. As of Tuesday, nine people in the United States have died.

Is it more dangerous than the flu?

It depends on how you look at it — more people have died from the flu this winter than from COVID-19, because far more people have gotten the flu. However, the percentage of COVID-19 patients dying from the disease is higher than the percentage of flu patients dying from the flu. The CDC has reported about one tenth of one percent of people who get the flu die from it, while estimates for the fatality rate of COVID-19 have ranged from 1% to 3% of patients — China’s version of the CDC puts it at 2.3%. Like the flu, people who are elderly or have underlying health conditions such as high blood pressure are more at risk of complications.

What can I do to protect myself?

COVID-19 spreads like other respiratory diseases, through tiny droplets spread by infected people as they talk, cough or sneeze. Therefore, preventative measures are things everyone should have already been doing all along. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the restroom, when you return home, before eating or cooking, before putting in contacts, and other times that seem appropriate. When soap and water aren’t available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Regularly sanitize surfaces, from door knobs to cell phones. Don’t share utensils, drinks or food with others. Avoid touching any part of your face without first washing your hands. Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, stay home if you’re sick and avoid other people who are sick. If you’re more worried than usual about germs, you can decide to take some extra precautions such as not shaking hands with people, avoiding travel or limiting the trips you take to public places such as grocery stores and restaurants.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

Contact your primary care provider and take their advice.

For more information:

OHA Emerging Respiratory Disease page: www.healthoregon.org/coronavirus
Washington Department of Health: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>
CDC COVID-19 page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
CDC travel notice: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>
WHO page: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus>

ease can cause serious illness and has resulted in thousands of deaths across the world, but we want to remind people that the vast majority of people infected with COVID-19 will have a mild disease,” he said.

He added that people more likely to suffer more serious symptoms are the elderly and people with other health problems like respiratory issues, heart disease, obesity or diabetes.

In wake of the news about the Umatilla County case, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock — the board’s public health liaison — booked an emergency flight home from the National Association of Counties legislative conference in Washington D.C., which he and the other com-

missioners were attending to get face time with FEMA and federal legislative staff in hopes of securing funding for the county’s flood recover efforts.

“We talked as commissioners and felt that in light of the situation, one of us needed to be home,” Murdock said Monday afternoon before boarding his flight. “My top priority is getting home as fast possible.”

On Tuesday afternoon, the county’s public health department announced that the patient was recovering, and the department is waiting for results on testing of three people close to the patient. The county urged people who are ill to call their doctor’s office before going there or to urgent care in person.

Damage

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next week for parks staff and inmate work crews to finally get in there and start removing items.

Once the debris is gone, Fetter said the plan is to rebuild the parking lot and playground on the south side of the park, where flood water has typically avoided. The current developed area will then be turned into grass.

“We’re going to relocate as many improvements as we can away from the floodway,” he said.

Fetter said people have asked why the city doesn’t build a levee to protect the park from flooding, but affecting the river channel that way would require permission.

“It’s very difficult to get that permitted, and we very likely wouldn’t be able to get it permitted because parks are generally meant to take on water,” he said.

In that way, the park and adjacent Bureau of Reclamation property did exactly what they were meant to do — the water that they took on was channeled away from homes that could have otherwise flooded.

Fetter said for now crews will do the heavy lifting, but for people who are anxious to help restore the park, there will be plenty for them to do if they show up at Riverfront Park at 9 a.m. on May 2 for the annual “I Love My City” event.

“If people want to roll up their sleeves and work, that would be a good day to do it,” he said.

Over in Echo, the city “didn’t have too much” damage to its own infrastructure, city administrator David Slaght said. There was just a damaged pipe and some damaged roads.

Its residents, however, were hit harder.

“Some of the homes in town are not livable and that’s still being worked



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Pavement in the parking lot at Riverfront Park in Hermiston sits in disarray after floodwaters severely damaged the park during last month’s floods.

on,” Slaght said.

Many people and organizations donated cleaning supplies, and he said they have come in handy as residents have battled homes full of mud and, increasingly, mold.

Echo’s main source of economic support is its agricultural community, Slaght said, but in many cases they were “hurt pretty bad.”

“We’ve got farmers that their pivots don’t have a field to go in,” he said.

Slaght said he believes the flood breaching Interstate 84 helped save parts of town. He had been out helping evacuate people in the early morning hours of the flood, and water had been rising toward homes. When it suddenly dropped back, the emergency scanner he was listening to started reporting the truck crashes on the interstate caused by the sudden appearance of flood water there.

“When it blew across the freeway, it reduced pressure on the southeast side of town, just enough to keep those homes from flooding,” he said.

Slaght said that day, and in the weeks since, it has been humbling to see the way Echo Community Church, Echo School District, Echo Rural Fire Protection District, service

organizations, individual volunteers and others had come together to help. He said the county commissioners had also been very helpful through the process.

Farther down the river in Umatilla, flood damage was mostly limited to the Umatilla School District’s athletic complex that flooded after the berm behind the high school was breached.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe said the district was still in “hurry up and wait” mode for assessing and cleaning up the damage. Because Umatilla was at the end of the line for the flood waters that swept through various industrial and residential areas, they have to wait for soil tests measuring contaminants to come back with results before they can begin moving dirt.

“It’s really hard to assess the level of damage until it’s clean enough to do that,” she said. “Right now the track is under several inches of dirt.”

The district’s newest storage shed is alright, but some other storage areas were damaged, and possibly the baseball announcer’s stand. The berm along the river also needs repaired, and Sipe said because it was the school district that originally built it in 1997, it is the district’s responsibility.

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PET OF THE WEEK

Troubles is a sweet senior. She is approx. 12 years old. Great with dogs, fine with cats. Has skin allergies and takes Apoquel for it. She absolutely loves people and loves to snuggle. She is looking for a comfortable home to retire to.



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