

School districts, businesses provide internet options

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NEWS EDITOR

After Oregon students got the news on Wednesday that they will be “distance learning” for the rest of the school year, students who don’t have internet access are at a disadvantage.

Fortunately, for those students, internet providers, cellphone carriers and school districts are stepping up to extend access.

Charter is now offering free Spectrum broadband internet for 60 days to households with at least one K-12 or college student who do not already get service through Charter if they call 844-488-8395. Installation fees will be waived.

The company is also opening up its Wi-Fi hotspots, which usually require a Charter customer password and username, for free public use. They can be located at www.spectrum.com/free-wifi-hotspots.html.

“As the country works



HH file photo

A Spectrum service truck sits parked near the Umatilla County Courthouse last month. Spectrum is among a growing list of service providers taking extra steps to alleviate the financial impact of COVID-19 closures on consumers.

collaboratively to contain this pandemic, broadband internet access will be increasingly essential to ensuring that people across the country are able to learn and work remotely, that businesses can continue to serve customers, and that Americans stay connected and engaged with family and friends,” the company stated.

Comcast is also opening up Xfinity Wi-Fi Network for free nationally. The network has several locations in Hermiston and Pendleton and two in Pilot Rock. People can find the hotspots by downloading the Xfinity app or searching for their ZIP code at <https://wifi.xfinity.com>.

For current CenturyLink customers, the company is

suspending limits on data usage, waiving late fees and holding off on terminating service for people who are struggling to pay their bill.

Eastern Oregon Telecom recently extended Athena, Weston and Adams their first broadband internet service, and is offering customers in those areas free installation and their first two months of service free. Customers who have already signed up can get two months of internet free if they refer a friend. Service can be set up by calling 541-289-7000.

Pendleton Fiber Co. posted to its website that Wtechlink is waiving installation fees for new customers in the next 60 days who need internet installed to participate in school or work from home, and is encouraging customers who are struggling to pay their bill because of COVID-19 to call the office at 541-276-2887 to discuss payment plans.

School districts providing internet options

Some school districts are also working to provide their own internet options for students, in addition to making Chromebooks available for students to check out.

Umatilla School District has set up Wi-Fi hotspots in its school parking lots and in neighborhoods around the city, and in some cases providing individual students with internet if they are not within walking distance of a hotspot.

Pendleton School District sent a letter to parents detailing options for students, including Wi-Fi hotspots at Washington and McKay Creek elementary schools.

Stanfield School District is working to procure internet hotspot devices that can be checked out to families in need.

Families without internet access are asked to reach out to Superintendent Beth Burton at 541-449-8766.

Echo School District families without internet

are asked to contact Superintendent Raymon Smith at rsmith@echosd5.org.

Cellphone carriers

The nation’s largest cellphone carriers have all signed a pledge to increase access during the COVID-19 crisis, including waiving late fees and not disrupting service for people who contact the carrier to show they’re experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19.

AT&T and T-mobile have both launched \$15 monthly plans. T-mobile is giving current customers unlimited data and AT&T is giving current customers an additional 10GB of data.

Sprint is giving unlimited data to capped plans for the next 60 days and adding 20GB of hotspot data for those who have Wi-Fi hotspot capability.

Through April 30, Verizon is adding 15GB of data, free international calling and unlimited domestic minutes to most plans.

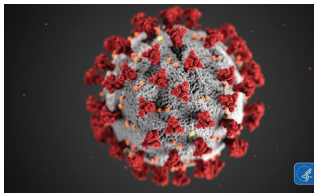
Umatilla County announces new cases of COVID-19

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla County Public Health announced two new cases of the novel coronavirus on Monday, bringing the county’s total to 16, and released a map Tuesday indicating most of the county’s cases are in the Hermiston area.

According to a press release, both of the people diagnosed with COVID-19 on Monday were in close contact with previous confirmed cases and are recovering from home in self-isolation.

As with previous cases, the county is declining to include demographic information like city of residence, age range and gender with these new announce-



Centers for Disease Control Photo
COVID-19

ments. However, on Tuesday, the department released a map at www.co.umatilla.or.us/health/covid_map/ showing a range of cases by zipcode. The map indicates a majority of the county’s cases are in Hermiston and Umatilla.

Of the 16 reported diagnoses, the county health department says 11 are still actively sick, with the rest considered recovered completely. None of the active

cases are hospitalized and no one in the county has died.

The Umatilla County Public Health website states that 400 tests have been conducted, of which 16 have tested positive.

Morrow County now has five positive cases, which the county says includes cases in both the northern and southern parts of the county.

The statewide report put out by the Oregon Health Authority on Tuesday noted a total of 1,633 confirmed cases in the state, and 30,730 tests that had come back negative. Fifty-five people in the state have died from complications of COVID-19, and investigative reporting by *The Oregonian* and other Oregon

news outlets revealed last week that roughly half those deaths have happened in a handful of nursing homes.

Based on the report, 56% of confirmed cases are female, at least 49% are white (25% of patients are of unknown race), and 47% are under the age of 50. At least 17% are health care workers, 59% are not, and 25% are unknown. At least 23% were hospitalized during their illness, 68% were not, and 9% are unknown.

The state currently has 328 of a total 751 adult intensive care unit beds available, and 85 of its 198 pediatric ICU beds open.

The *New York Times* database of confirmed cases nationwide showed 587,834 cases and 25,191 deaths.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the 2009 swine flu infected 60 million Americans and killed between 8,868 and 18,306 people over the course of 12 months.

Umatilla County Health director Joseph Fiumara said in a news release that the department encourages healthy individuals to continue essential functions, but to avoid all non-essential trips outside of home and maintain six feet of distance from other people when they do go out.

“To minimize the spread of COVID-19 between communities, we strongly encourage all residents to utilize essential services within the communities where they live,” he said.

Employers are encouraged to enforce social distancing in the workplace, give employees time off for illness and send them home if they are ill. Anyone who knows they are sick should isolate themselves in their home until 72 hours after their symptoms subside.

“Both the short-term and long-term success of containing COVID-19 in Umatilla County hinges on every single resident of Umatilla County adhering to the ‘Stay Home Save Lives’ order from Governor Brown,” Fiumara said. “Maintain social distancing, stay home unless absolutely necessary and help fight the spread with proper hand-washing and hygiene techniques.”

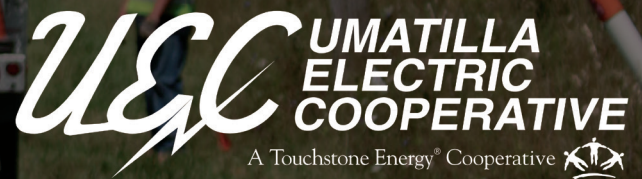


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