

Outdoor recreation considered lower risk

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Outdoor recreation and sports, such as tennis and mini-golf, are considered lower risk activities for contracting COVID-19 than indoor activities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How the virus is transmitted outdoors versus indoors is a major factor in assessing risk of contraction, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Umatilla County Public Health Director Joseph Fiumara said it is generally easier to spread the virus in confined spaces, especially in crowded settings with little air flow.

“Outdoor recreation is considered to be lower risk generally because there is more ability to stay distant,” he said. “Outside environments, with increased air flow, increased sunlight, decreased surfaces in which to hide, all help to reduce the risk.”

Although outdoor recreation is deemed lower risk, it is dependent on the space, duration of time spent in that space and how many people are there. Fiumara



People walk the trails at Riverfront Park in Hermiston in early May.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, File

said it also depends on the sport or activity. If it's a contact sport that makes it difficult to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet, then the sport is no longer con-

sidered lower risk.

“Activities with no/minimal contact or close proximity are considered to be the lowest risk,” Fiumara said. “As the proxim-

ity and contact increase, so does the risk. Additionally, strenuous activity/breathing may help to expel the virus further than day-to-day activities and may

need additional physical distancing to counteract.”

Tennis, for example, is a low-risk outdoor recreation sport because the number of players are lim-

ited and there's usually a safe distance between each player. This is a lower risk venture than some indoor entertainment and recreation opportunities, such as bowling and ice skating, where the air remains stagnant and the space is more confined, according to Fiumara.

Other outdoor recreation activities and sports that are permitted by the Oregon Health Authority under Phase 2 include tennis clubs, playgrounds, volleyball, youth clubs and summer camps.

The basic guidelines for the state of Oregon under Phase 2 includes limiting outdoor gatherings to 250 people or less, granted there's enough space for appropriate social distancing measures.

However, there's conflicting guidelines for different counties in Oregon, according to Fiumara.

He said the health department has been working closely with the cities of Hermiston and Pendleton specifically to help figure out the guidelines for their aquatic centers.

“The way some of the guidelines were rolled out was not all in concert with itself,” he said.

Hiring:

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wide decreased from 14.9% to 14.2% and is expected to keep decreasing in the coming months.

In Oregon, beside leisure and hospitality, industries that gained jobs in May were mainly health care and social assistance. Bechtoldt said she anticipates a hiring surge in the coming months in construction, manufacturing, and retail and trade. As more nonessential businesses reopen, jobs in restaurants, shops, hair salons and other retailers also should become available.

“As far as other industries, we expect some jobs

to return but it's too early to say what the long term impact COVID-19 will have on the local economy,” she said.

Area businesses currently hiring include Nookies, Shari's, The Pheasant, and Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Pendleton.

Although Oregon has seen job gains, Bechtoldt said there were still substantial job losses in Oregon, more specifically in government and education.

Permanent job losses, jobs that no longer exist, are going to take a long time to regain.

“I think statewide it's going to take a long time to recover all the jobs that have been lost in the three months,” she said. “This is

a historic loss and Oregonians are suffering the economic realities of being unemployed.”

Overall, job losses since April are 43,500, according to the Oregon Employment Department. Umatilla County lost 3,520 jobs in one month. Leisure and hospitality, which includes hotel and restaurant jobs, lost 940 jobs. Tribal government lost 800 jobs, manufacturing lost 690 jobs, and retail and trade lost 230 jobs.

The employment department has been experiencing high volumes of calls and delayed payments, but Bechtoldt noted their worksource centers are ready to provide job seekers with services and additional assistance.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Reannah Thurman sets up outdoor seating at OMG! Burgers & Brew in downtown Pendleton on May 15, 2020, as the restaurant prepared to open for dine-in service.

Council:

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more permanent setup.

Spencer told the council that staff and the mobile vendors had examined 13 different sites around town, and the top three options were improving the current location on Orchard Avenue, moving the trucks to Newport Park or moving them to Butte Park off Seventh Street.

Spencer said Newport Park was the least viable option as only four trucks would fit in the space available, and it would move them to a residential area with relatively low traffic.

The Butte Park alternative was the most expensive option, Spencer said, based on the paving and utility work that would be needed, and would bring the trucks to a less visible location. But vendors would be able to keep an eye on the splash park and Funland playground there during the day, and could do good business when the park is crowded during soccer games.

The third option would be to turn the parking lot on

Orchard where the trucks are currently into an RV park style set-up where each food truck would have its own designated space with utility hookup, and the city could add further improvements such as shade and restrooms.

Spencer and Parks and Recreation Director Larry Fetter said Orchard was the recommended location because it was the most visible, customers were used to it, it would cost less to upgrade and it helped create a more “robust” downtown district.

“There are definitely seasonal advantages to (Butte Park), but from a year-round point of view and then the opportunity to bring people downtown, at least from a staff point of view, it really kind of grew to be our favorite,” Fetter said.

Patrick Hunt, owner of Southern Twain BBQ and the current manager of the pod, said that was the option he and the other vendors favored. He said said Butte Park started out as his favorite but he realized it was “off the beaten path” and they might lose customers. He supported enhancing the current site with utility hook-

ups, shade and a better parking setup.

“Anything is subject to change, but I'm just a little worried that if we move right now the clientele won't move with us,” he said.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he liked the Butte Park idea, because it was surrounded by grass and trees instead of a “streetscape.”

The council will vote on a proposal at a later date.

On Monday the council also chose a design for the wayfinding sign program that the Urban Renewal Agency is launching this year, using money raised from the urban renewal district downtown. The city has been working with consultants from Merje Environments and Experiences on a project that will create a unified, decorative look for signs around town directing people to features such as parks, trails, schools, public parking lots and the library.

Hermiston Chamber of Commerce Director Kimberly Nevil said she appreciated the city's work on the project and was glad the chamber had been asked to participate in planning. She said when visitors come to

town for sports tournaments and other events, the chamber gets a steady stream of calls from people asking where things are.

“I truly believe the wayfinding signage will increase the livability of Hermiston and help with tourism,” she said.

During the time for councilor remarks at the end of the meeting, Councilor Roy Barron asked the council to consider providing some sort of support, such as a letter or official resolution, for the Oregon Worker Relief Fund.

The fund provides financial support to undocumented immigrants and their family members who have been impacted by COVID-19 but are not eligible to receive stimulus checks, unemployment insurance

and other benefits provided through the federal CARES Act.

Barron said he was nervous bringing up the topic, since he knows the subject of undocumented Americans can be controversial, but it means a lot to him and to many members of the community.

“If we can endorse the relief fund I think it sends a very powerful message to the state that even rural areas like Hermiston understand have a lot of people in our agricultural sector and just in our community that mean a lot to us,” he said.

Drotzmann said he applauded Barron for his bravery and conviction in being willing to start a public conversation about something that can be controver-

sial, and said he thought it was appropriate to send a letter to state Rep. Greg Smith and Sen. Bill Hansell thanking them for their work on the state's relief package that included \$10 million for the relief fund, and voicing support for continued state aid to the fund.

Councilor Jackie Myers also said she thought thanking Smith and Hansell was appropriate. Councilor Manuel Gutierrez said many of the people the fund helps work hard in difficult circumstances to provide for their families but haven't been able to see the same relief from the government that other Americans have.

“People don't realize how hard you work in the fields,” he said. “I used to work in the fields.”

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