

# Umatilla County returns to Phase 1

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County was allowed to return to Phase 1 of reopening on Friday, Aug. 21, after its COVID-19 metrics improved significantly.

Mayor David Drotzmann said during the Hermiston City Council’s meeting on Monday, Aug. 24, that he spoke with Gov. Kate Brown earlier that day, and she congratulated the community on doing what needed to be done to decrease its numbers enough to move back into Phase 1 after three weeks.

“She said the results were dramatic, and we’re seeing results from that and our numbers going down, she gave applause to Umatilla County for that,” he said.

According to a news release from Brown, between the county’s return to baseline and its return to Phase 1, Umatilla County’s test positivity rate went down from 32% to 18.8%. Its total weekly cases went down from 320 to 166 and its cases per 100,000 people went down from 394 to 205. The county’s “sporadic” case rate of cases not able to be traced back to a source were down from 94 per 100,000 to 58 per 100,000.

Drotzmann said the governor told him many of the outbreaks in the state are stemming from social gatherings, however, and so she is asking communities to continue to push education on the dangers of such gatherings and the need for people to social distance and wear masks.

He said if the county stays on its current trajectory it will be another 200 days before Hermiston schools will meet the current criteria for reopening.

“Her plea to us today is to try to work with our communities to control the social gathering issues — wearing masks, distancing, outdoor gatherings, that sort of stuff, washing hands — to try and get our kids back to school,” he said. “I would agree with that message. I would agree that we need to get our kids back to



Echo School District second grade teacher Billie Parker, left, prepares reading and writing journals for her students as teaching assistant Been Magnuson sets out student materials ahead of student pickup on Aug. 19, 2020. Government leaders are encouraging Umatilla County residents to reduce social gatherings to help the county’s schools be able to reopen sooner.

school, and so we as leaders need to communicate that.”

While enforcement of the restrictions in different phases of reopening have mostly been left to state agencies to handle, Brown has in recent days stated that she may turn to local law enforcement to ask for help in enforcing rules about gatherings and what can be open. Drotzmann said when he asked Brown about what resources the state would be providing to help with that, it was “pretty clear” there wouldn’t be any.

When councilors asked Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston whether his department had the resources to take on significant enforcement of COVID-19 rules, Edmiston said the department has already been stretched thin by other problems and would find it difficult to find the resources to do so.

Police continue to respond to increasing numbers of calls related to homelessness and mental health issues, Edmiston said, and the department has faced a slew

of high-profile crimes, including multiple shootings in the area this year. The department also used up a month and a half’s worth of overtime budget related to a shooting and multiple protests on Aug. 21-22.

“To add more to the load while trying to negotiate, I don’t know if civil unrest is the right word, but unhappiness, what-

ever the case may be — that’s a lot to ask,” he said.

According to the state’s guide for reopening phases, under Phase 1, personal care services, such as barber shops and salons can reopen, as can gyms and malls. Bars and restaurants can reopen for in-person dining until 10 p.m. Indoor social gatherings are limited to 10 people. Civic, cultural

and faith-based gatherings are capped at 50 people. Physical distancing, masks and other requirements are still in place, and recreational facilities, such as bowling alleys and swimming pools, remain closed until Phase 2.

Counties must wait three weeks before applying to enter a new phase, meaning the soonest Umatilla County could return

to Phase 2 is Sept. 11.

## Statistics for Aug. 25

As of Aug. 25, Umatilla County had reached a total of 2,445 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, and currently has 142 presumptive cases (meaning the person is showing symptoms after being exposed but has not received a test result yet), nine hospitalizations and 35 deaths.

On Aug. 24, Umatilla County Public Health announced the deaths of three individuals who had tested positive for COVID-19.

They were a 66-year-old man who tested positive July 23 and died Aug. 20 at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington; a 64-year-old man who tested positive Aug. 3 and died Aug. 23 at Regency Hermiston Nursing and Rehabilitation Center; and a 71-year-old woman who tested positive July 23 and died Aug. 23 at Regency Hermiston Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. All three had underlying conditions, according to the news release.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States has recorded 5.7 million cases of COVID-19 and 176,617 deaths of individuals with COVID-19. According to the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon has confirmed 25,391 cases and 427 deaths.

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