



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, File
A sign outside of Hermiston's temporary city hall advises people to wear a mask on Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2020.

Umatilla County COVID-19 cases drop

By JADE MCDOWELL and ALEX CASTLE
STAFF WRITERS

Umatilla County reported six new confirmed COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, Sept. 22. The number brings the county to 55 new cases in the seven days from Sept. 16-22. As of Sept. 22 Umatilla County Public Health reported there were 152 presumptive cases in the county, defined as people who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 after being exposed to someone who tested positive, but has not received a test result. The county reported one resident was hospitalized with COVID-19 as of Sept. 22, and a total of 41 residents have died after testing positive for the virus. The most recent COVID-19 death reported was a 97-year-old woman with underlying conditions, who died Sept. 8 at Regency Hermiston Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. Hermiston has had the most cases of COVID-19 in the county since the pandemic began, according to the Oregon Health Authority, with 1,512 confirmed cases. In order to meet the Oregon Department of Education's metrics to reopen schools in the county, Umatilla County must have no more than eight new cases of COVID-19 per week for three weeks in a row to bring all students back, and 24 cases a week to bring just kindergarten through third grade back, along with a test positivity rate of less than 5%. About 15% of the county's tests have come back positive in recent weeks. A total of 15,592 tests have been conducted on Umatilla County residents since the pandemic began, with 2,774 coming back positive, according to Umatilla County Public Health. Umatilla County is beginning to lay the groundwork at its health department for the capacity to administer COVID-19 vaccines when they become available. The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners approved

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Joe Fiumara, Umatilla County public health director

expanding a nursing position at the health department to full time and the purchase of canopies that could be used for both drive-thru testing and vaccination events at its meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 16. "Drive-thru testing for COVID has become somewhat mainstream," said Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara. "As we are hoping for a vaccine to be coming out relatively soon, we're trying to get ourselves in place and prepared for that to happen." Both moves made Sept. 16 can initially be used to bolster vaccination programs the health department already runs for the flu, Fiumara noted, and canopies may be especially necessary for trying to administer large-scale vaccination events during inclement weather this winter.

Morrow County moves to Phase 2

State removes Umatilla, Morrow counties from watchlist

By ALEX CASTLE
STAFF WRITER

Two Eastern Oregon counties made progress in the long road of recovering from the coronavirus pandemic on Friday, Sept. 18. Gov. Kate Brown announced in a press release that Morrow County was moving into Phase 2 of reopening, and it and Umatilla County were both removed from the state's COVID-19 watchlist. "I want to commend county officials and community members in Umatilla and Morrow Counties for stepping up and working together to reduce the spread of COVID-19," Brown stated in the release. The third time was the charm for Morrow County getting to Phase 2, which had two previous requests denied by the state after being moved back to Phase 1 on July 30. Indoor and outdoor recreation and entertainment venues, such as movie theaters and pools, are able to reopen in Phase 2, in addition to restaurants and bars being permitted to stay open until 10 p.m. and large gatherings being capped at 50 people. In order for a county to enter Phase 2 of reopening, it must meet prerequisites set by the state that include six metrics involving trends of hospitalizations, new cases, tracing and testing, in addition to reporting a case rate below 100 cases per 100,000 people. According to the Oregon Health Authority, Morrow County recorded 15 new cases the week of Sept. 6-12, good for a case rate of 118.3 per 100,000. Though

that was its lowest case rate since at least June, Morrow County also recorded a positive test rate of 28.9%, its highest in over a month. That uptrend in positive test rate also means Morrow County is failing to meet one of the additional six metrics. Morrow County's positive test rate for COVID-19 hasn't fallen below 20% since at least the start of July. While data published by the Oregon Health Authority suggested the county wasn't eligible for Phase 2, Morrow County pleaded for the state to evaluate its response to the virus and the impacts of reopening more businesses holistically. "We don't have a theater. We don't have a bowling alley. We don't have a sports venue," said Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay. "So from Phase 1 to Phase 2, what really happens?" Lindsay said the county had that conversation with Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen on Sept. 18 and communicated their belief that any changes from Phase 1 to Phase 2 would have limited impact on the spread of the virus. "While Morrow County still must make additional progress in reducing its COVID-19 case count to fully meet all metrics for Phase 2, the county also lacks the types of facilities and large venues that are eligible to reopen in Phase 2," the press release stated. According to the press release, Morrow County is also being removed from the county watch list along with Umatilla County, which

entered Phase 2 of reopening on Sept. 11. While removal from the watch list has essentially no impact on the county's operations or response to the virus, Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer called the news a "PR win" for the county. "It doesn't do a whole lot other than taking us out of the spotlight of the watch list," Shafer said. The watch list is intended to inform state policymakers and the Oregon Health Authority about the spread of COVID-19 in individual counties and assist in prioritizing resources for those counties. The state uses data on sporadic COVID-19 cases to determine whether a county will be on the watch list, meaning it's determined by the number and rate of cases that can't be traced to a known source of transmission. A county is added to the watch list if it reports more than five sporadic cases and a sporadic case rate that exceeds 50 sporadic cases per 100,000 people during a two-week span. According to the Oregon Health Authority's county watch list data, Umatilla County's two-week sporadic case rate averaged just under 60 cases per 100,000 in the weeks between Aug. 9 and Sept. 5. Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said the county recorded 38 cases that couldn't be traced to a known source from Aug. 30-Sept. 12, good for a two-week sporadic case rate of 46.8 per 100,000 people.

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JOB ANNOUNCEMENT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WALLOWA COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

APPLICATIONS DUE: September 28, 2020 at 5pm at Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce Office
RANGE: \$42,000 - \$52,000
POSITION TITLE: Executive Director
STATUS: Full Time and reside in Wallowa County
COMPENSATION: Salary Range \$42,000 - \$52,000
BENEFITS: Vacation, Holiday, Sick Leave, and Simple IRA
SCOPE: The Executive Director is the face of the Chamber and is responsible for implementing the mission and work plan of the organization. This individual provides leadership within the Chamber and the community, helping create a favorable "business and living" environment in Wallowa County.
ACCOUNTABILITY: The Director is responsible to the Board of Directors and reports directly to the President.
APPLY BY RESUME: Please include a letter of introduction and resume. Resume is to include contact information, education, work history (including starting and ending dates), and three references (2 professional and 1 personal). Send resumes to: Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce PO Box 427, Ste B, Enterprise Oregon 97828 Email: info@wallowacounty.org, 541 426-4622

The Wallowa County Chamber Board of Directors is looking for a special individual to fill this unique opportunity. Desired professional attributes include but are not limited to:

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Dynamic approach to creativity, initiative, collaboration, and leadership.
- Enthusiasm to effectively work in a community and regional partnerships.
- Exceptional customer service skills.

OVERALL KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

- Strong leadership and organizational skills.
- Strong verbal and written communications skills.
- Knowledge of financial processes used in non-profit organizations.
- Skilled with various computer programs.
- Strong marketing and promotional skills.

QUALIFICATIONS

College degree in business administration, marketing, planning and/or other related field, or equivalent experience.