

Dental health should be part of plan for seniors, dentists say

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As Medicare's Dec. 7 deadline for enrollment approaches, Umatilla County dentists hope people will make plans for caring for their oral health.

Dr. Todd Oyama of Medical Center Dental in Pendleton said while people tend to think of dental care as separate from other medical care, oral health has impacts beyond the mouth, and has been linked to systemic diseases, such as heart disease.

"It's all the same body," he said.

Oyama and Dr. Jason Walker, also of Medical Center Dental, said older patients can be at increased risk for dental problems, for a number of reasons. Patients' gums can begin to recede, leaving them more vulnerable to decay of the tooth's root, known as root caries.

As people age, their taste buds tend to become less sensitive, spurring them to favor richer, sweeter foods that are harder on teeth. And many medications for older adults cause dry mouth, which speeds tooth decay.

Walker said he often sees patients who came in regularly for cleanings while their employer paid for their dental insurance, but after they retired decided that since they haven't had any significant issues with their teeth in the past, they can skip paying for cleanings and checkups.

"All of a sudden, they'll come in and say, 'This is hurting,' and they'll already have quite a bit of decay,"



Hermiston Herald, File

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Dr. Todd Oyama, of Medical Center Dental in Pendleton

Walker said.

He suggested that if they are able, retirees should continue to come in twice a year for a cleaning to address the hard plaque buildup that home care won't take care of, and to catch major problems before it's too late to save a tooth or multiple teeth.

"Dentures are better than nothing, but our own teeth are ideal," he said.

Oyama said good home care is also important for people of all ages, including regular brushing and flossing, fluoride mouthwash and a healthy diet.

Open enrollment for Medicare runs to Dec. 7. People can sign up for the first time, or shop for coverage that better fits their cur-

rent needs. Eastern Oregon residents have new options available this year through Summit Health, a partnership between several Eastern Oregon hospitals that is providing Medicare Advantage plans.

Oregon residents can visit healthcare.oregon.gov/shiba/Pages/index.aspx, call 1-800-722-4134 (toll-free), or email shiba.oregon@oregon.gov to find answers to questions or the nearest Oregon Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance volunteers who can help them enroll or change their plan before Dec. 7.

Hermiston-area residents can also call Good Shepherd Health Care System directly at 541-667-3509 to schedule assistance.

Cryptocurrency company to expand ATMs to Umatilla County

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Cryptocurrency used to be the province of the tech-savvy, but it could be more accessible to Umatilla County residents in 2021.

Daniel Polotsky, the CEO and founder of CoinFlip, said the company recently expanded into Oregon with a cryptocurrency ATM in Roseburg, and he expects the company will be installing ATMs in Umatilla County in the next six to 12 months.

"We're trying to make the process of cryptocurrency super simple for everyone," he said.

In layman's terms, cryptocurrency is a type of digital money that is not tied to a specific country or government.

Cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, are based on blockchain technology, which authenticates the currency by creating a sort of public, decentralized ledger recording the history of a unit of currency as it is transferred from person to person.

Polotsky said CoinFlip's ATMs around the world allow people to put in the currency of the gov-

ernment where they are located and receive one of nine different popular cryptocurrencies in their digital "wallet." They can then use those cryptocurrencies to purchase items from sellers that accept them.

"You put in cash, and then get cryptocurrency to your wallet before you even get to your car," he said.

Some of CoinFlip's more than 1,400 ATMs also allow users to turn their cryptocurrencies back into U.S. dollars.

According to CoinATMRadar, which provides a searchable online database of cryptocurrency ATMs, there are currently about 12,429 such ATMs in the world. The site does not yet list any in Umatilla County, but lists several in the Tri-Cities in Washington. Polotsky said most ATM providers, including CoinFlip, look for convenience stores and other locations that are open 24 hours a day and have high foot traffic.

Cryptocurrencies are known for their volatility compared to traditional currencies — according to Fox Business, on Thanksgiving Day Bitcoin was

trading at \$16,581.20 per bitcoin after a high of \$19,391 a few hours earlier. The unpredictable nature of the decentralized currencies means the internet is rife with stories of people who became millionaires by investing in the right currency at the right time, and people who lost their life savings by betting on the wrong currency and watching it fizzle out.

The Federal Trade Commission cautions that while cryptocurrencies come with benefits, such as anonymity and a lack of bank fees, they also don't come with the same government-backed protections as a traditional bank account. Scammers are frequently asking their victims to pay in cryptocurrencies, the FTC warns on its website, because victims are unable to get their money back by disputing a credit card charge or other recourses they have with traditional methods of payments.

"Cryptocurrency payments typically are not reversible," the website states. "Once you pay with cryptocurrency, you only can get your money back if the seller sends it back."

First vaccinations coming to Oregon in mid-December

By GARY A. WARNER
OREGON CAPITAL BUREAU

Pending federal approval, the first 35,100 of a COVID-19 vaccine shots could be administered in Oregon on Dec. 15, the governor's office confirmed on Monday, Nov. 30.

The vaccine, created by Pfizer, is being sent to states in advance of expected approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. A total of 6.4 million doses of the vaccine are being sent to states in quantities based on their per capita percentage of the U.S. population.

The first shipment of shots in Oregon will be used to inoculate doctors, nurses and other health care workers and medical facility staff who are working around COVID-19 patients.

State health officials have cautioned that vaccines for

all the general public who want one will likely take months.

Inoculation requires two shots given 19-23 days apart. On Dec. 31, Oregon would receive another 35,100 doses for the second shot to be given to those who had started the inoculation process.

An additional 52,650 doses in the shipment would be used as the first shot for the next group of vaccine recipients. At a recent news conference, Gov. Kate Brown said Oregon has about 300,000 health care workers.

Additional doses of the Pfizer shot will arrive regularly beginning in January 2021. After health care personnel, a draft proposal of the state's vaccine plan calls for inoculation of at-risk residents of congregate care facilities, such as nurs-

ing homes, along with staff who come in contact with residents.

If a second vaccine from Moderna becomes available, as expected by year-end, the number of people inoculated can be increased.


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Visit <https://hermiston.or.us/public-transit> to find out how to sign up, and how WORC and the HART bus service work together to connect Hermiston.