

OHA expands weekly reports

Workplace outbreak lists include active outbreaks in Umatilla and Morrow counties

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The Oregon Health Authority has expanded its weekly reports on COVID-19, including its workplace outbreaks list.

The department previously sent out a single document on Wednesdays, summing up COVID-19 statistics for the week prior and listing outbreaks at workplaces and nursing homes. Last week, it began publishing three documents — a more in-depth look at COVID-19 statistics in the state, a report of the number of cases per ZIP code, and an outbreaks report.

The new outbreaks report lists outbreaks of COVID-19 in workplaces, in nursing homes and other congregate care facilities, in child care facilities and cases among K-12 students and staff.

The workplace outbreak list reports jobsites with at least 30 employees and at least five cases linked to the site, whether through employees testing positive or close contacts of those employees testing positive.

The outbreaks report published on Wednesday, Dec. 2, shows 11 Umatilla County and Morrow County workplaces that were previously on the list of active outbreaks, including Lamb Weston Hermiston, Hermiston Walmart and Two Rivers Correctional Institution, have recently been moved to the “resolved” category after going more than 30 days



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton represents the largest workplace outbreak of COVID-19 in Umatilla County, according to Oregon Health Authority.

with no new cases among employees or their close contacts.

It also shows few new outbreaks in the area, leaving Umatilla and Morrow counties with 12 jobsites currently on the list of active outbreaks. Some have never moved off the list after initial outbreaks over the summer, while others have returned after previously being moved to the resolved category, and then seeing new cases.

Those workplaces are:

- Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, 520 cases (first case reported July 8)
- Lamb Weston East in Boardman, 90 cases since July 13
- Walmart Distribution Center in Hermiston, 87 cases since June 30
- Good Shepherd Health Care System in Hermiston, 73 cases since July 16
- Lamb Weston Pac Center in Boardman, 59 cases since July 1
- Home Depot in Hermiston, 18 cases since July 24

- Marlette Homes, 12 cases since Nov. 16
- Shearer's Foods in Hermiston, 12 cases since Nov. 16
- Keystone RV in Pendleton, 10 cases since Nov. 16
- Lamb Weston West in Boardman, 10 cases since Nov. 9
- Smith Frozen Foods in Weston, 10 cases since Nov. 17
- Earl Brown & Sons in Milton-Freewater, nine cases since Oct. 28

The senior care report lists all senior care facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living options, where at least three cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the past 28 days.

- The Dec. 2 report lists:
- Avamere at Hermiston with 45 cases and three deaths of residents with COVID-19
 - Regency Hermiston Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, with 5 new cases of COVID-19 since Nov. 11
 - Guardian Angel Homes in Hermiston with 4 cases

The child care section of

the report shows child care facilities with capacity for at least 16 children with at least two cases of COVID-19 in the past 28 days among children, staff or close contacts of children or staff. The Dec. 2 report shows:

- Room to Bloom Day Care in Pendleton, six cases
- Good Shepherd Children's Center in Hermiston, two cases

The school section of the report includes schools that have offered some form of in-person instruction this year, such as the limited in-person instruction for special education students. It lists all staff and students that have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 28 days, regardless of whether they have been in the school building at all.

In west Umatilla County and Morrow County the Dec. 2 report shows:

- Stanfield Elementary School, two students and one employee
- Heppner High School, one student
- Riverside High School in Boardman, one student and one employee
- AC Houghton Elementary School in Boardman, one employee
- Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston, two employees
- Hermiston High School, one student and one employee
- Sam Boardman Elementary School in Boardman, one student

For more reports from OHA, including hospitalizations, testing, and cases broken down by demographics and ZIP codes, visit govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19.

UEC to return \$5.1 million to its customers

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla Electric Cooperative will be returning \$5.1 million in profits to its members in December as part of the cooperative's Capital Credits program.

About 8,700 current and former UEC customers, who purchased electricity from UEC in 2006 and 2007, will receive a refund, according to a news release by UEC.

Checks are scheduled to be mailed in the second week of December, and the amount is based on the customer's electricity usage during those years. Amounts under \$10 will not be mailed out, but will be saved and added on to future refunds until the total reaches at least \$10.

UEC is a not-for-profit cooperative owned by all of its members, designed to operate at cost. When

UEC makes profits above what it needs to continue running, it returns money to its members through the Capital Credits program. According to UEC, since it began issuing refunds in 1960 the cooperative has returned \$85 million to members.

Robert Echenrode, UEC general manager and CEO, said in a statement that the cooperative's strong financial position and ongoing efforts to control costs and maximize efficiencies make such distributions possible.

“The Board is pleased to help make a positive impact in the community around the holidays, when it may be needed the most,” he said. “We know this has been a difficult year for many people.”

For questions about the Capital Credits program, call UEC at 541-567-6414.

Dollar General considering store in Umatilla

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Dollar General could be coming to Umatilla.

Dollar General spokesperson Angela Petkovic said in an email that the company is still in the “due diligence” phase and has not made a final commitment yet.

The national chain of variety stores has been working with the city's planning commission, however, and meeting minutes from the commission's Oct. 27 meeting shows the committee has reviewed a site plan for the possible store and unanimously approved a plat for Dollar General to combine five tax lots into one. At that meeting, the minutes state, a representative from the company described Umatilla as a “great regional location” for a store.

Petkovic said the company anticipates making a final decision by summer 2021.

“Our customers are at the center of all that we do, and meeting customers' needs is Dollar General's top priority when

choosing store locations,” she wrote. “In selecting store sites, we take a number of factors into consideration, carefully evaluating each potential new store location to ensure we can continue to meet our customers' price, value and selection needs. We further strive to provide convenience for customers who may not have affordable nearby retail options.”

The approximately 7,500-square-foot store would be located at the corner of Sixth Street and Yerxa Avenue, according to information submitted to the planning commission, and Petkovic said it would employ six to 10 people.

Dollar General sells food, household goods, health and beauty items, seasonal decorations and other merchandise. Not to be confused with Dollar Tree, the store's prices vary by item. According to information provided by the store, it offers grants each year to schools, libraries and nonprofits within a 15-mile radius of its stores and distribution centers.

Club 24 closes at request of OSHA

Fitness center owners say they complied to avoid ‘crippling fines’

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Club 24's Oregon locations and the Hermiston Athletic Club are closed at the request of Oregon's Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

The locations, where people sign up for a monthly membership in exchange for use of workout equipment, fitness classes and other exercise, initially stated they were staying open as “wellness centers” after Gov. Kate Brown initially ordered gyms and fitness centers to close as part of the state's latest COVID-19 restrictions. But on Nov. 30, Club 24's Oregon locations and Hermiston Athletic Club posted identical messages to their Facebook pages, stating they would close effective immediately “as per Oregon OSHA.”

The message stated that member accounts would be frozen and staff would be furloughed during the holidays as a result.

In response to a public records request, OSHA responded that there had not been fines or other official enforcement actions taken against the businesses because the owner had voluntarily complied with shutting down after being contacted by OSHA.

Customers reacted with



Hermiston's Club 24 is shown on Nov. 22, 2020.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

disappointment on social media at the announcement. In an email to the *East Oregonian* and *Hermiston Herald*, Hermiston Club 24 member Chris Waine said he joined Club 24 about 15 years ago after exiting the military. His membership helped him transition back into civilian life and work through injuries he suffered as a result of his service, he said.

“Over these years, I came to understand many members suffer from past physical injury,” he said. “It would not be untrue to say that a large majority of people go because motion begets motion. Over the years, we've motivated each other and offered words of encouragement as we struggled to find balance in pain management through fitness.”

“In other words, the state views these facilities as rec-

reational. They failed to realize these facilities provide a place and equipment for those of us who graduate from out patient physical therapy. These facilities are as much a necessity as any outpatient physical therapy clinic. Let's not forget also the mental benefit of physical fitness.”

In an emailed statement, Club 24 said they complied with OSHA's request in order to avoid “crippling fines” as they appeal OSHA's decision that they fall under a category that must be shut down under current COVID-19 restrictions.

The business cited a study by the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association of 50 million check-ins at exercised-based businesses in the United States compared to self-reported COVID-19 infection rates

of those members, concluding that safety measures at gyms and fitness centers around COVID-19 have been “incredibly effective” at keeping members safe from the virus.

“We are confident that we are meeting, if not surpassing, the safety measures of clubs in this study and look forward to working with OSHA and the State of Oregon on safely and responsibly operating our business that so many Oregonians are dependent upon for their physical and mental health,” Club 24's statement said.

They added that they appreciate members who have offered to keep paying their dues even while the club is shut down, in order to help the club support employees that are being furloughed during the closure.



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