

## Hermiston plans return to full-time classes

Change in distancing rules allows new schedule starting April 13

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

What's the difference between 3 feet and 6 feet?

For Hermiston students, it's the difference between hybrid learning and full-time school.

On Monday, March 22, the Oregon Department of Education announced that schools would only be required to keep students 3 feet apart in the classroom. The next day, Hermiston School District announced that all grade levels would be returning to class full time, five days a week, starting April 13.

Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the previous 6-foot requirement had been the thing holding the district back from offering full time school sooner. Once 6 feet was only recommended, but not required, the district was eager to move forward.

"We might have to look at how we use some spaces differently, but we're excited to have everyone back," she said.

Building administrators are working out the logistics now.

According to ODE's "Safe Schools, Ready Learners" guidelines, elementary school students can sit 3 feet apart regardless of

their county's COVID-19 case levels, while middle and high school students can be 3 feet apart in counties with fewer than 200 cases of COVID-19 in a 14-day period. Umatilla County has been averaging roughly half that in recent weeks.

In some situations — including physical education classes, choir or band classes and times when students are taking off their masks to eat lunch — 6 feet of space between students are still required.

Mooney said in Hermiston,

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Students in Lucas Eivins' social studies class sit socially distanced during class at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston on Thursday, March 26, 2021.

### UPDATES

## COVID-19 numbers updated

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla County saw 42 new cases of COVID-19 reported in the past week, from Wednesday, March 24, to Tuesday, March 30, according to Umatilla County Public Health.

The regional dashboard on the health department's website also showed seven new cases and one new death of a person with COVID-19 reported in Morrow County.

Statewide, *The Oregonian* reported on Monday, March 29, that Oregon averaged 351 cases a day over the past week, up 28% since March 15. The paper's analysis also found the state's test positivity rate had increased, to 3.8%, and active hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients had increased by 22% to 142.

The increase of cases in Oregon and in the United States as a whole comes as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and other federal officials have asked states to keep up their COVID-19 restrictions a little while longer, warning that people are relaxing their precautions too quickly before enough of the population is vaccinated.

The American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living released a study showing positive news for nursing homes, however.

The organizations, which together represent more than 14,000 nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the country, released a report on March 30, stating that nursing homes have seen a 96% decline in new COVID-19 cases among residents since Dec. 20, 2020, and COVID-19-related deaths in nursing homes declined by 91% during the same time period.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Jaime Aguilera, left, receives a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during a mass vaccination event for farm and food processing workers in Morrow County at the Sage Center on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

## Roll up those sleeves



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Staff at a COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman administer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Cars navigate a COVID-19 mass vaccination event at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

## Umatilla and Morrow counties begin vaccinating ag workers

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
STAFF WRITER

Officials in Umatilla and Morrow counties are ramping up vaccine efforts after receiving approval from the state to broaden eligibility to agricultural workers immediately in an effort to help a workforce hit disproportionately hard by the pandemic.

While agricultural workers, food processing workers, pregnant women and people ages 45 and up with underlying conditions became eligible statewide on Monday, March 29, Umatilla and Morrow counties had already received permission to start vaccinating those groups a week early.

In Morrow County, officials from the Oregon Health Authority worked with county officials at a four-day mass vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman through Saturday, March 27.

Akiko Saito, deputy director for the COVID-19 response and recovery unit, a joint division between the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Human Services, said the clinic was a "pilot project" specifically geared to immunize a community long understood to be espe-

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For a list of vaccine clinic locations and contact information, see **Page 9A**.

cially vulnerable to COVID-19.

In all, officials vaccinated over 1,000 agricultural workers at the clinic, according to the Morrow County Health Department.

Saito said state officials are looking to hold similar efforts statewide. State officials recently conducted a survey with 585 agricultural facilities that showed more than 21,000 workers were eligible for the vaccine.

"We're working with our local public health authorities to connect agricultural, migrant and seasonal workplaces to see if they can do an event(s) like this" across Oregon, Saito said.

In Umatilla County, health officials have started reaching out to agricultural and food processing facilities, hoping to bring vaccines to people who are both hard to connect with and often can't take time off work.

"We are trying to aggressively

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**A9** ▶ The same construction company will build both of Hermiston's new elementary schools