

All Oregonians eligible for COVID-19 vaccine as of April 19

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Oregonians over the age of 16, who have not qualified for the COVID-19 vaccine in any of the phases of the vaccine rollout, will be eligible for a shot as of Monday, April 19.

After moving through all of the specialized groups — most recently, essential workers and those with underlying conditions — the state had planned to make the vaccine available to everyone over the age of 16 on May 1. But on Tuesday, April 6, Gov. Kate Brown announced the new date will be April 19.

“We are locked in a race between vaccine distribution and the rapid spread of COVID-19 variants,” Brown wrote in a news release. “Today, Oregon will pass the threshold of 2 million vaccine doses administered. And yet, in communities across Oregon, COVID-19 is spreading at concerning rates. We must move as quickly as possible to get more shots in arms.”

She said it is still critical to focus on equity for communities of color that have been disproportionately hard-hit by the virus with higher case counts, hospitalizations and deaths.

“We must reach Oregonians where they are, including those who may not have easy access to health care or the ability to take time off from work,” she said.

The governor’s announcement came as President Joe Biden also moved up his preferred timeline for states. He had previously urged them to open up eligibility by May 1, but this week changed that goal to April 19 as states reopen, more contagious variants become more prevalent and numbers indicate the country is beginning a “fourth wave” of the pandemic.

In Umatilla and Morrow counties, health departments have been working to vaccinate agricultural workers quickly ahead of harvest,



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.



A syringe is filled with the Moderna vaccine during a COVID-19 vaccination clinic at Bethlehem Inn in Bend on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021.

as well as reaching other eligible groups.

Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said the county is expecting to receive more than 2,000 doses for upcoming clinics,

which have been scheduled to try to accommodate as many work schedules as possible. The county has also been visiting area farms, food processing plants and other large job-

sites in an effort to reduce the amount of time workers would have to take time off to get vaccinated.

Lindsay said the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been popu-

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

lar among workers at those sites, because workers know they won’t have to take time off to get a second dose or possibly deal with side effects a second time.

The county held clinics on Monday, April 5, and April 6 at the SAGE Center and will be offering free vaccines again at the SAGE Center, 101 Olsen Road N.E. in Boardman, on Wednesday, April 7, from 6 a.m. to noon.

Another clinic will be held at AC Houghton Elementary School, 1105 N. Main Ave., Irrigon, on Friday, April 9, from 1 p.m. to

7 p.m. and Saturday, April 10, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. The third clinic will be held at the Morrow County Fairgrounds, 74473 Highway 74, Heppner, on Monday, April 12, from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Tuesday, April 13, from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said his county is also reaching out to jobsites to offer to bring the vaccine directly to workers, but so far the department hasn’t had as good of acceptance for that as they had hoped. He also said, however, that sometimes that has been because a large portion of workers have already been vaccinated elsewhere.

He said the county was recently invited out by a business that had far more employees than he had realized, and so encouraged workplaces to reach out to the county if they feel like they would be a good candidate for bringing in a vaccine clinic, but haven’t been contacted.

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have an exhaustive list,” he said. “If there is a business out there that feels they have been overlooked, please reach out to us.”

People who are eligible for the vaccine can also go to Good Shepherd Medical Center on Thursday, April 8, from noon to 4:30 p.m. for their first dose, or make an appointment with Safeway, BiMart, Walmart, Mirasol Family Health Center or Family Health Associates. A list of clinics being held by Umatilla County Public Health can be found on the health department’s website.

Blocked pipes clog sewers

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A sewer line backed up along West Hartley Avenue in Hermiston on Wednesday, March 31.

Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said wastewater backed up into the basement of two homes on the 600 block of West Hartley Avenue during the evening. The city paid for O So Kleen to clean up the homes, something Morgan said is standard when a city line was at fault. The cause of

the backup was roots from trees in the vicinity of Third Street and Hartley working their way into the city’s sewer main and blocking it.

Morgan said root intrusions are common, and city crews clean more than 10,000 feet of sewer main each month to address the problem. He said one of the first sewer projects after the city created its Capital Improvement Plan two years ago was to run a video camera down a “large percentage” of the city’s sewer lines to determine causes of clog-

ging and figure out how to better fix and prevent them. The city now has \$1.9 million in sewer main replacements planned for the next five years.

The city asks residents to never dump grease down their drain or flush “flushable” wipes or baby wipes down the toilet.

Wipes get stuck on roots and then fats, such as bacon grease, congeal around the wipes, creating what the wastewater industry calls “fatbergs” that clog sewer mains.

I-84 construction project near Meacham began April 5

HERMISTON HERALD

Construction will slow traffic on Interstate 84 between Meacham and Spring Creek for the next two years.

The Oregon Department of Transportation will begin a new paving project between milepost 238 and 248 starting on Monday, April 5. During construction, vehicles will be rerouted to one side of the interstate at

a time, with a single lane in each direction. The speed limit will be reduced to 50 miles per hour, and Oregon State Police will increase its patrol presence.

According to an email from ODOT, reconstruction of milepost 238 to 241.5 will take place in 2021 and the rest will be completed in 2022. ODOT will begin next week by closing the left lanes in each direction in order to construct the “cross-

overs” needed for traffic to move onto the new travel route.

The email states the project will replace the asphalt that has become rutted from severe winter weather and chain use, creating hazardous conditions where ice collects in the ruts and cracks and cannot be removed by snow plows. Crews will also complete some other upgrades to guard rails, median barriers and bridges.

Construction blocks part of Umatilla River Road

Closure may last three to four weeks as road realigned, hump removed, turn lane added

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla River Road between Northeast 11th Street and Cooney Lane outside Hermiston is closed for the next three to four weeks for construction.

Tom Fellows, public works director for Umatilla County, said the road is going through a realignment that will include general improvements and repaving, underground utility work, removing a “hump” in the road, and adding a center turn lane

for drivers entering the city’s Recycled Water Treatment Plant.

“We’ll add a turn pocket so they can get out of the traffic flow,” he said.

Fellows said the project is being paid for by a federal grant administered by the state known as an All Roads Transportation Safety Grant, which is triggered by the number of traffic crashes in an area of road, including fatal crashes.

During construction, drivers using Umatilla

River Road will need to connect to the road farther north or use an alternate road between Hermiston and Umatilla.

Beginning this week, Umatilla River Road between Northeast 11th Street and Cooney Lane will be closed for up to four weeks as the Umatilla County Road Department undertakes a construction project.

This will impact travel in Northwest Hermiston and to Umatilla. Detour signs are in place and motorists are advised to use alternate routes, including Highway 395 when traveling between Hermiston and Umatilla.

Cascade Natural Gas offers grants for customers behind on bills

HERMISTON HERALD

Cascade Natural Gas is offering a debt relief program for residential customers whose bills are past due because of financial hardship.

According to a news release, the Oregon Public Utilities Commission approved the program, known as the Big Heart

Grant, on March 25.

One option, the Automatic Hardship Grant, is designed for customers with a history of receiving low-income assistance on their utility bills. They can automatically receive a one-time grant for the amount of their total past due balance, up to \$1,500.

The Financial Hardship Grant is for customers who

have not receive energy assistance in the past two years but are currently experiencing financial hardship. A grant of up to \$1,500 will be applied to the customer’s past due balance, calculated by household size, income and account balance.

For information, or to apply for a grant, call Cascade Natural Gas at 1-888-522-1130.

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