

Johnson & Johnson vaccine pause cancels Morrow County clinic

By **BRYCE DOLE**
STAFF WRITER

Morrow County officials canceled a vaccine clinic in Heppner on Tuesday, April 13, after federal health agencies recommended that states “pause” the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine while officials investigate six reports of blood clots in women ages 18 to 48, out of nearly 7 million Johnson & Johnson vaccines administered so far.

“It was going to be our last strong day in Morrow County,” Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said. “This is really depressing and disappointing and frustrating. We really want to get people vaccinated so we can keep moving forward, and as we see (coronavirus cases) going up around the state, it’s just concerning.”

The six cases are among the nearly 7 million people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in the United States as of Monday, April 12, with no other serious adverse reactions having been reported, according to the *New York Times*.

One of the women has died and another is hospitalized and in critical condition, according to federal officials. None of the six women were Oregonians, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The announcement prompted Oregon health officials on April 13 to temporarily suspend the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine statewide. At least 81,255 Oregonians have received that vaccine so far, according to state health data.

Dr. Janet Woodcock, the commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said at a news conference on April 13, that the pause



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Maria Corona receives her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during an event for farm and food processing workers at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

is expected to last “a matter of days.” That time frame, however, is contingent upon what federal officials learn in its investigation, Woodcock said.

Lindsay said she’s worried that the rare negative cases could induce a misleading stigma that COVID-19 vaccines are unsafe for the general population.

“I’m not a medical professional, but when you read the data, those six people are from a very specific demographic,” she said.

The Morrow County clinic was part of an eight-day commitment with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Oregon Health Authority intending to vaccinate people en masse with 2,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

With one day left to go in the effort, the county had only used “about 800 doses” Lindsay said. She added that the county was planning to give the rest of the doses to Malheur County to help raise its vaccination rates, “but at this point that will be on hold.”

The clinics were seeing low turnouts partly due to vaccine hesitancy among newly eligible groups, Lindsay said.

“I’m definitely worried about how this will play into that hesitancy,” she said, adding that with cases rising across both the state and country, “now our ability to vaccinate is slowed down.”

To Lindsay, the canceled clinic felt like a lost opportunity. The clinic was one of three nationally where FEMA officials were assisting in the vaccine rollout, bringing much-needed staffing and resources to a county that has reported relatively low vaccination rates in recent months, Lindsay said.

“It was a lot of people on the ground that gave our health department a break,” Lindsay said. “We most likely won’t see that kind of dedication from the federal government to a small county” again.

The single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine is ideal for workers that cannot take time off work to get a shot, Lindsay said. Those include agricultural workers — a workforce hit especially hard by the pandemic in Morrow County, prompting state and local officials to hold local clinics in recent weeks specifically geared toward that demographic.

“As we go into a busy time of year, and spring is

here, the (agricultural) community is getting more and more busy,” she said. “Getting people in even once was difficult.”

The remaining doses will be kept in refrigerated storage for the time being, but they will expire in June, as all Johnson & Johnson vaccines do after three months. Lindsay called the possibility of expiration “concerning.”

In a statement, Johnson & Johnson advised people who’ve received its vaccine to contact a health care provider if they experience symptoms of blood clots within three weeks of their vaccinations, including headache, abdominal pain, leg pain or shortness of breath.

All Oregonians age 16 and up become eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine starting Monday, April 19.

The date lines up with a new push by the Biden administration for all states to open up eligibility in order to fight against new, more contagious variants of the virus and a new increase in cases as states open up.

While Johnson & Johnson vaccines are on hold, Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are still available.

In Umatilla County, residents can find information on where the vaccine is available within the county online at ucohealth.net/covid-events-new. Locations in Hermiston where appointments are available each week include Safeway, BiMart, Walmart, Family Health Associates, Mirasol Family Health Center and Good Shepherd Medical Center.

Locations for Morrow County clinics, and a sign-up sheet for those interested in being contacted about availability, can be found on the Morrow County Health Department Facebook page.

Good Shepherd welcomes two new physiatrists

HERMISTON HERALD

Good Shepherd Health Care System has welcomed two new physiatrists to the Good Shepherd Medical Group’s Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Clinic.

Doctors Trey Rigert, M.D., and David Russo, D.O., join chiropractor Dr. Christopher Scott to form a comprehensive pain management team for the clinic.

Physiatrists specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation. Both Rigert and Russo are board certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation, according to a news release.

Rigert finished medical school at Oregon Health Sciences University, completed his residency at University of California-Irvine, and has 30 years of experience.

Dr. Russo completed his residency at Mayo Clinic, completed a fellowship at Oregon Health & Science University, and has been practicing for over 20 years.

In the news release, Rigert called it an “amazing opportunity” to offer a new line of full service physical medicine and rehabilitation through Good Shepherd, and praised the equipment available, space the clinic is housed in and the working relationship with

Scott, who has already been providing chiropractic services through Good Shepherd for several years.

Rigert said for many people, if pain lasts longer than three months, the original injury may have healed but the “pain switch” has been left on, and it’s time to consult with a doctor.

“First we look at our patients as a whole person, not as a problem,” he said. “You are not just spinal stenosis or a nerve injury.

You are lived experience, what you eat, your support person, how your injury occurred, etc. We are here to help our patients accomplish their goals, not just helping them to overcome their pain.”

The Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Clinic generally sees patients age 13 and older, with some exceptions.

According to the news release, those patients are usually referred by their primary care provider or another provider, but patients can seek a consultation directly if they think they can benefit from the clinic’s services. Providers at the clinic are taking new patients.


For a consultation or information, call 541-667-3832 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or visit www.gshealth.org/good-shepherd-medical-group/physical-medicine-rehabilitation-clinic.




Russo



Rigert



Free COVID-19 testing coming to Umatilla County thanks to the University of Oregon’s RADx-Up team.




FREE CONFIDENTIAL COVID-19 TESTING

NO INSURANCE/IMMIGRATION STATUS NEEDED

- Local drive-through model promotes safety.
- Testing every Saturday & Sunday thru August.
- Free and confidential; no insurance or immigration status required.

SCAN TO REGISTER



Pre-Registration Available But Not Required. Results in 2 - 4 Days. <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/osjp/registro/>

<p>UMATILLA HIGH SCHOOL: 10 A.M. - 1 P.M. ATKINSON STAFFING: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M. <i>Every First & Third Saturday</i></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"> <p>March 6 April 3 May 1 June 5 July 3 August 7</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%;"> <p>March 19 April 17 May 15 June 19 July 17 August 21</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>March 6 April 3 May 1 June 5 July 3 August 7</p>	<p>March 19 April 17 May 15 June 19 July 17 August 21</p>	<p>UMATILLA ELECTRIC: 10 A.M. - 1 P.M. <small>HERMISTON OFFICE</small> STANFIELD ELEMENTARY: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M. <i>Every Second & Fourth Saturday</i></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"> <p>March 13 April 10 May 8 June 12 July 10 August 14</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%;"> <p>March 27 April 24 May 22 June 26 July 24 August 28</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>March 13 April 10 May 8 June 12 July 10 August 14</p>	<p>March 27 April 24 May 22 June 26 July 24 August 28</p>
<p>March 6 April 3 May 1 June 5 July 3 August 7</p>	<p>March 19 April 17 May 15 June 19 July 17 August 21</p>				
<p>March 13 April 10 May 8 June 12 July 10 August 14</p>	<p>March 27 April 24 May 22 June 26 July 24 August 28</p>				

Umatilla Electric Boardman Office: 3 P.M. - 6 P.M. Every Second and Fourth Friday