

# Flu: More information on how to handle the H1N1 virus

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 dent absenteeism. Schools that have been closed based on previous guidelines may be reopened

Other details:

- Public hotline: For more information about the H1N1 influenza virus, the public may call a toll-free public health hotline weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Pacific time: 1-800-978-3040.

- H1N1 testing: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sent testing materials today to state testing laboratories, with those coming to Oregon expected to arrive over the weekend. By Monday, Oregon expects to be able to test for the H1N1 influenza virus.

- Protections against the flu: Best protections against the H1N1 influenza virus are to wash your hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes with tissue or sleeve (never your hand), and stay home if you are ill. Surgical masks can protect people's noses and mouths from droplets carrying the influenza virus; however, use of surgical masks is not being recommended at this stage of the disease.

- Antivirals: Oregonians are discouraged from stocking up

on antivirals for which they have no immediate use.

- Pork not a disease source: People cannot catch H1N1 influenza virus, also known as swine flu, from eating pork.

Washington County public health has opened a bi-lingual hotline for citizens concerned about H1N1 Virus. The hotline will be available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The phone number is 503-846-2999.

Following are precautions to help prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you are sick, stay home. Do not go to work, school, church, or any public gatherings. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

# More benefits for unemployed

(Salem) – Governor Ted Kulongoski signed into law Senate Bill 462, which will allow 6,000 more jobless Oregonians to qualify for unemployment benefits. The bill comes at a crucial time when more Oregonians are looking for work and need assistance to make ends meet as they seek employment.

“People across Oregon are struggling and this bill is critical to keeping food on the table and shelter overhead for those who have lost their job due to the declining economy,” Governor Kulongoski said. “By changing how benefits are calculated we are opening the door for thousands of Oregonians to get help when they desperately need it.”

Current law determines eligibility for benefits based on something called a “Base Year.” Wages are counted in four of the last five calendar quarters, but wages from the most recent completed quarter are not counted. Senate Bill 462 creates an “Alternative Base Year” which counts wages from the four most recent completed quarters. Due to this change in calculation, more Oregonians will be eligible for benefits.

The law also allows Oregon to receive \$85 million dollars in federal funds from the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act, under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, to further enhance the state unemployment insurance system.

“With this bill we will be able to take advantage of federal dollars to provide more efficient and comprehensive unemployment insurance services to the people who need them,” Governor Kulongoski said.

Unemployment benefits come from an employer-paid trust fund. The fund is automatically adjusted to provide eighteen months of benefits through a moderate recession. Currently, Oregonians can receive a minimum of \$138 and a maximum of \$443 per week for as many as 79 weeks (including a federal \$25 per week addition).

The state Employment Department will contact individuals who will qualify for benefits under this new law, which takes effect July 1, 2009.

# County jobless rate climbs steeply

Columbia County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 14.3 percent in March, a significant increase from the previous month (12.2%) and the year before (6.2%). It also exceeds the statewide rate (12.1%) and the national rate (8.5%). Total employment dropped by 251 to 21,545 and

the number of unemployed people rose by 324 to 3,805. Total employment this March was 1,064 fewer than one year before and there were 2,246 more people unemployed this year. March's unemployment rate was the highest in the county since the current data series began in 1990.

# Buy first home can earn tax credit

by Steve Calhoun, Oregon Realty

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (aka the Stimulus Bill) authorizes a tax credit of up to \$8,000 for qualified first time home buyers who purchase a principal residence between January 1 and December 1, 2009.

The purchase date is the date of closing and title transfer.

The tax credit is equal to 10 percent of the home's purchase price, up to a maximum of \$8,000, and is refundable even if the taxpayer has little or no tax liability. For example, if a

qualified home buyer had a federal income tax liability of \$5,000 and had tax withholding of \$4,000, he would owe the IRS \$1,000. If that same taxpayer qualified for the \$8,000 home buyer tax credit, he would receive a check for \$7,000 (\$8,000 minus the \$1,000 owed).

A first-time home buyer is defined as a buyer who has not owned a principal residence during the three-year period prior to the purchase. For married taxpayers, the law uses the home-ownership history of both spouses.

# Vote counting test, ballot drop sites

The Public Certification Test of Columbia County's counting equipment for the May 19 Special Districts Election will be held on Tuesday, May 12.

The testing will begin at 2:00 p.m. in the County Elections Dept. at the Columbia County Courthouse. The public is welcome to attend.

Drop sites for the election

will be as follows:

- Vernonia Library, May 1-18 during regular hours. Hours will be extended on May 19 from noon to 8:00 p.m.

- Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD Office: May 1-18, during regular office hours, plus extended hours of noon to 8:00 p.m. on May 19.

# Elections are scheduled to pick neighborhood CPAC members

Columbia County will be holding Citizen Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) elections, for those positions whose term is expiring.

CPACs provide advice and recommendations on Land Use Planning to the Planning Department, the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners. CPAC members serve for two-year terms.

Each CPAC is divided into neighborhoods. Members represent neighborhoods in which they reside or own property. Residents and/or property owners within the neighborhoods elect their CPAC members. There must be at least five voters from each neighborhood to hold an election for the neighborhood. In order to be eligible to vote you must show either picture identification prov-

ing that you live in the CPAC neighborhood where you will cast your ballot; or a tax statement proving that you own property within the neighborhood where you are voting. You may vote only once in your CPAC area.

CPAC elections will be held in the following locations, and at the following times:

- Upper Nehalem, Tuesday, May 12 at 7:00 p.m. at Vernonia City Hall, 1001 Bridge St.

- Mist-Birkenfeld, Wednesday, May 13 at 7:00 p.m. at the Hemeon residence, 14090 Wallace Rd., Mist.

For more information about the boundaries of the CPAC and the elections process, contact Columbia County Chief Planner Glen Higgins, or Land Use Planner Debbie Jacob at 503-397-1501.

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