

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 23, 2021

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COVID-19 Public Health Update

Union County, Oregon — Center for Human Development (CHD) public health is reporting an increase in COVID-19 cases this week. Cases have more than doubled when compared with last week and so far are the highest we have seen in one week since early February. This is a trend that is being seen statewide and nationally. Our test positivity rate has also increased, which means there may be more people with coronavirus in the community who have not been tested yet. Most of the people testing positive are cases of community spread, meaning they are not sure how or where they became infected.

Many of the preventive measures that helped slow COVID-19 transmission were lifted at the end of June which may be contributing to the increase along with summer activities that involve more interaction and close contact with people outside of our households. “We want to provide Union County residents with this information so that they can use it to make informed choices for themselves and their loved ones. Particularly for people with underlying conditions where the virus could lead to serious outcomes including death. And for those unable to be vaccinated” shared public health administrator Carrie Brogoitti. “These numbers are not the highest we’ve seen, but we know it is critical to be proactive before hospitals get overwhelmed.”

CHD wants the community to be aware of COVID-19 variants that are now dominant in our state. Viruses constantly change through mutations, and these changes can increase transmissibility and decrease the effectiveness of treatments or vaccines. “We are very concerned about the variants and how they may impact spread in our community” stated Joelene Peasley, CHD Nurse Practitioner. Our current understanding of the variants lead us to believe they are more transmissible, lead to more severe illness, and are less responsive to the treatments we have available.” In areas where vaccination rates are lower these variants could likely contribute to higher rates of disease and more severe illness.

Vaccines have been shown to be highly effective against COVID-19 and the currently circulating variants, protecting people from the disease and severe cases of the illness. “The vaccines we have available to us have undergone extensive safety testing and have shown that they provide protection from COVID-19 and the variants we are seeing in Oregon” Joelene Peasley shares. “Most of the COVID-19 cases we are seeing in our county and beyond are in unvaccinated persons, and the vaccine has really done its job in minimizing the severity of illness in vaccinated persons and kept them out of the hospital.”

Vaccination is recommended for anyone who has had a confirmed case of COVID-19. Information about natural immunity, or the immunity that is gained from having a confirmed case of COVID-19, is still being gathered. Experts do not know exactly how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19, but the vaccine can increase the protection that is gained from having the virus.

COVID-19 vaccine is free to everyone, regardless of ability to pay or insurance. Vaccine clinics are available at the Center for Human Development (CHD) at 2301 Cove Avenue in La Grande. Primary and second doses will be available on a first come, first served drop-in basis every Friday from 10:00AM to 2:00PM. If you are interested in getting vaccinated at these walk-in clinics, arrive during this time and fill out your registration on-site. Vaccines are also available at most local pharmacies with no appointment required. Your health care provider may also be offering the vaccine. If you have questions or need assistance in getting vaccinated please call 541-962-8800.

Aside from vaccine, our best tool is for ill persons to isolate themselves and to identify contacts who may have been exposed and keep them away from others as they may develop the disease. Outbreaks in workplaces can happen quickly, so staying home if you are ill or are a close contact to a confirmed case is critical to slowing and stopping the spread of COVID-19 in our community and minimizing the impact to local businesses. Resources are available to support you during isolation and quarantine including financial assistance, food bank information, grocery pickup/delivery, health insurance, and Veterans services. Information is available at <https://www.neonoregon.org/unioncovid19> by calling 541-962-1610 or by emailing covidwrapsvcs@union-county.org.

If you need further general information about COVID-19, please visit our webpage www.chdinc.org/covid19 or call 211.

For more information:

- The public can call 211-information with general questions
- OHA Emerging Respiratory Disease page: www.healthoregon.org/coronavirus
- CDC COVID-19 page: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html
- Center for Human Development: www.chdinc.org
- Oregon COVID-19 Testing Location Finder: <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-oha-covid-19-testing>