



**WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION**

MAY 27, 2020

This meeting was held on Google Hangout Meet

Meeting ID: <https://meet.google.com/joo-mudn-vpm?hs=122>

or call in to [1-502-382-4610](tel:1-502-382-4610) PIN: 321 403 268#

PRESENT: Scott Hege, Chair
Kathy Schwartz, Vice-Chair
Steve Kramer, County Commissioner

STAFF: Kathy Clark, Executive Assistant
Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer

Agenda Item – COVID-19 in Wasco County

Chair Hege opened the session at 11:02 a.m. and explained the process for online meetings.

Public Health Officer Dr. Mimi McDonell stated that Wasco County has reported 20 positive cases of COVID-19 with one death; Sherman County has one recovered case; Hood River County has reported 12 cases; Gilliam County has had no cases. Public Health is contact tracing and investigating all cases in the tri-county area (Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam Counties). Positive cases are isolated for 10 days after onset or until they have had no fever for 72 hours. Close contacts are asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Chair Hege asked how many contacts are tracers able to locate. Dr. McDonell replied that it varies, but usually not in the hundreds. Generally it is the list of people the patient lives and works with; probably between 2 and 10.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked how it was determined that spending 15 minutes in proximity constitutes “close contact?” Dr. McDonell responded that it is not an exact calculation but it is a conservative estimate based on science; circumstances could shorten that window.

North Central Public Health District Executive Director Teri Thalsofer announced that they have trained additional staff for contract tracing and are posting for temporary positions for contact monitors. Contact Tracers include bilingual staff. They are working with community partners in focus areas such as the homeless and

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elderly to create wrap-around services for those needing isolation or quarantine. They are also working to respond to the needs of businesses. Our work with the local orchardists is serving as a model for the state. Masks and cleaning supplies were distributed to the orchardists last week. Nicole Bailey is heading up that effort and is monitoring to see if more supplies will be needed. Dr. McDonell has been focused on packing houses which will need extra precautions. Orchardists have been proactive in housing issues. OCDC and Migrant Ed are helping to prevent cross-contaminating between groups of workers. Our community has done incredible work. Environmental Health staff has stepped up to provide consultation to restaurants. Some restaurants are taking more time to get open; those that are open have really worked with Public Health to do the right thing – they are submitting plans and asking for site visits. We continue to look for guidance on Phase 2, which we expect to be provided this week. As gatherings increase, there is a significant concern. There are significant transmission possibilities in church groups where people are close and are singing. It is not unusual to see spikes as a result of this kind of activity. We understand how much people want to get back to their normal ways of worship. We continue to work hard toward the safety of our communities.

Chair Hege asked what will change with Phase 2. Ms. Thalhoffer answered that we do not have the final guidance for that but expect gatherings will get bigger and more sectors may open. Dr. McDonell added that the size of gatherings may increase to 50 or 100. More people may be back in the workplace beyond medical and retail sectors. The earliest that could happen is 3 weeks after the start of Phase 1. We continue to do well and are making progress. This has been a massive community response and regional effort.

Mid-Columbia Medical Center President Dennis Knox reported that there is one COVID patient at the hospital – that is a good thing for the hospital and for the county. He reported that they have begun performing elective procedures at the hospital; this week they are at 75% of what they were doing in May of 2019. Kaiser is at 100%; Providence is at 70%. MCMC clinics are seeing more patients. Drive-through testing will be moving to the Columbia Crest Building to allow for more parking at Water's Edge. The hospital is monitoring personal protective equipment (PPE) and pleased to report that they are above a 30-day supply – well over the 14-day requirement. He stated that they continue to have a zero-visitors policy but would like to release that a little; they are working with the State toward that goal. They continue to screen all employees as they come in.

Mr. Knox went on to say that they are prepared for a possible second wave of the virus. He reported seeing a lot of people not observing social distancing or wearing masks over the Memorial Day weekend. The congregating of the population not taking precautions is concerning. Regional health care providers are working on consistent public messaging.

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Mr. Knox continued, saying that the Women's Center reports that women are having home births with uncertified providers; ER visits are down. We want to convey that it is safe to return to community hospitals. Every patient coming in for surgery is tested. The hospital is purchasing an analyzer that will produce test results in 45 minutes rather than 2-3 days; that is a game changer. It will cost \$110,000; the Health Foundation is providing the funds. The hospital is well prepared but cautiously optimistic that there will be no second wave.

Chair Hege asked if we will have enough kits for the rapid tester. Mr. Knox replied that rapid tests have been available since late March. For \$20,000, the hospital is purchasing cassettes – basically a starter kit - that will allow them to conduct tests for many months to come.

Ms. Thalhofer asked for an explanation of the rapid test compared to tests that have had troubling false-negative rates. MCMC Chief Clinical Officer Don Wenzler stated that the system the hospital will be using has a 99% success rate; it is the AVID Analyzer that has the poorer track record. Unfortunately, we will not have the equipment until July.

Vice-Chair Schwartz thanked everyone for the excellent report. She commended that gorge hospitals for working to get the message out regarding social distancing and wearing masks. She observed that people seem to be adhering less than a few weeks ago. Mr. Knox agreed saying that very few are masking.

Commissioner Kramer expressed his appreciation for all the work. He asked if there is more PPE on the way for the seasonal work force and if we have adequate supplies for start-up. Ms. Thalhofer replied that we are in a good place for start-up but would like fabric masks that can be washed and rotated. We were able to get a lot of supplies from the Department of Agriculture.

Commissioner Kramer asked about the migrant education program. Ms. Thalhofer responded that the team is planning for 10 students at a time. Dr. McDonnell said that her impression is that it is still at 10 but she has not looked in a couple of days. Commissioner Kramer stated that his concern is the cost of the program; if we are only teaching in groups of 10, Migrant Education will need more staff which will require more resources. He said he will bring that concern to the Unified Command.

Commissioner Kramer asked if we have any confidence that schools will open in the fall. Ms. Thalhofer answered that the Early Learning Hub has met with school superintendents. The Superintendent of the Southern Wasco County School District, Jack Henderson, feels confident that school will be open in the fall but it will be different. Schools are looking and planning on how to do that safely. The Governor's executive order closed the buildings which makes it difficult to do some of the things they could do while observing social distancing. The ESDs (Education

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Service Districts) are working closely to support superintendents and principals as new guidance comes forward. Commissioner Kramer commented that the Board of Commissioners will do what they can to help things along.

Chair Hege opened the floor for public comment/questions.

Rodger Nichols asked what other activities are occurring at the hospital. Mr. Knox replied that surgery is at 75%, pulmonary stress testing, and radiology are up and running. They are looking at therapies now with an eye toward PPE usage.

Mr. Wenzler added that as we bring things back, we carefully monitor PPE to stay in line with requirements and be prepared for a possible surge. The hospital has reworked cleaning regimens and they are re-educating staff for PPE usage. The goal is to continue to fulfill needs and keep employees safe.

Vice-Chair Schwartz asked for clarification that Wasco County has had 20 cases; that does not mean that we currently have 20 active cases. She went on to say that when you extrapolate, there have probably been more than 20 cases but some people who have been infected have not been tested. She asked what our real incidence could be in the county.

Dr. McDonell said that we have some positive cases that have recovered – more than are currently actively sick. We are fortunate to have had a lot of people who have taken advantage of being tested. It is not thought, at this moment, that 20 is the tip of the iceberg. There are probably some past and present cases not diagnosed. We are under 2% of those tested being positive. That can change and is dependent on behavior – the tests are a snapshot in time but can change based on public behavior.

Wasco County Prevention Coordinator Debby Jones asked if there is a protocol for reporting violations of the Governor's orders. She asked if restaurant workers are required to wear masks. Ms. Thalhoffer replied that there are Environmental Health staff with resources lists. The focus is on education. Information is available on the COVID web site. For restaurants, call Environmental Health; for grocers, call the Department of Agriculture; for other retailers, call OSHA. All of the regulating agencies want to educate. She stated that she sees a lot of people who are wearing masks, wearing them incorrectly and they need to be educated. We understand that masks are not always comfortable; but, there are not many medical conditions that would prevent someone from wearing a mask. Children may be an exception. She said what needs to be reinforced is that the mask is not about the wearer; it is about everyone you expose by not wearing a mask.

Dr. McDonell stated that the virus is not most frequently transmitted from surfaces but can be. It is mostly the close contact. She observed that some of the informational websites can be challenging; the Governor's website is easier to

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navigate and has good information. Face coverings can be hard for those with anxiety disorders or respiratory problems; we just need to give grace and educate.

Ms. Jones said that she envisions a marketing campaign where people proclaim who they are wearing a mask for. The group encouraged her to pursue that. She said she would send something out to the group for feedback.

Chair Hege asked if there were any further public comment/questions. There were none.

Forest Service Area Manager Lynn Burditt reported that a variety of agencies associated with outdoor recreation continue to work together toward alignment around easing restrictions on recreation at national sites. There will be a news release at 11:00 a.m. with a list of sites opening with eased restrictions – it will be only day-use sites at this time. There will be a website with an interactive map. The message is not that the gorge is open; it will be that we have heard the desire to get outdoors and this is what we can do. Eagle Creek fire restrictions remain in place as well as the waterfall corridor and the Sandy River delta. About half of the day use sites will have eased restrictions; high-use and camping sites will remain closed. All agencies are committed to have open bathroom facilities and adequate PPE.

Ms. Burditt went on to say that we want to keep staff, their families and the communities safe. None of the agencies have authority to restrict access to local traffic only. We will be observing the results of the soft opening and gather feedback. They are working with Ready, Set, GOrge for consistent messaging – all partners can point people to that site.

Commissioner Kramer said that he had the opportunity to visit the national forest and saw a lot of dispersed campers. He asked if they should have been in designated areas. Ms. Burditt said that this is the kind of feedback needed. She said that Skamania County Sheriff Brown is coordinating with Hood River, Wasco and Klickitat for common issues and interests. We plan to continue the broader group to monitor and move forward. She encouraged everyone to send feedback at any time.

Wasco County Sheriff Lane Magill said that the southern part of Wasco County is most heavily used for recreation. He reported 40 calls over the holiday weekend with most contacts made in the Pine Hollow/Rock Creek area. The increased activity was expected. There were also some calls on the Deschutes River which was full. Requirements for traffic enforcement have been relaxed so deputies are making more stops for things like speed, occupant safety, lane safety and distracted driving. He said that there is some confusion in the public and he is working with sheriffs throughout the gorge for consistency and messaging. We look at social distancing only as it relates to criminal activity. If there is contact, deputies use it as an educational opportunity. So far, the public has been respectful. He reported that

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new crimes and probation violations are increasing. The Sheriffs are looking at a plan to reopen NORCOR with restrictions on July 1st.

Chair Hege opened the floor to questions/comments. There were none.

Chair Hege observed that we are doing a good job as a region – lets' keep moving down the road. Wear your masks and keep your distance!

Chair Hege adjourned the session at 12:10 p.m.

Wasco County
Board of Commissioners



Scott C. Hege, Board Chair



Kathleen B. Schwartz, Vice-Chair



Steven D. Kramer, County Commissioner