



**WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL SESSION**

**JUNE 10, 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 McDonnell reported that there are 65 cases in Hood River County, 34 in Wasco County, 1 in Sherman County and none in Gilliam County. The congregate setting outbreak at Duckwall Fruit Company is responsible for approximately 50 of the new cases. Azure Standard had an outbreak with 6 people testing positive. 78 Wasco County residents were tested last week with only 2 positive. Public Health continues to provide guidance

Chair Hege asked if other counties were affected by the Hood River congregate setting outbreaks. Dr. McDonnell replied that there are 3 who live in Klickitat County, 1 in Moro County and 1 in Umatilla County. She went on to say that while we do have more cases, we expected to identify more as we test more. What we are tracking now is hospitalizations; there has not been an increase at Mid-Columbia Medical Center (MCMC) but there has been a bump statewide. These increases are certainly not to the levels that were seen in March and early April. Oregon Live has some useful graphs that make it easier to understand. The increases we are seeing locally now are related to congregate settings.

North Central Public Health District Executive Director Teri Thalhofer said that Public Health staff has done a lot of work to prepare for the migrant work season. WIC staff has changed how they are delivering benefits – doing that in the parking lot and remotely to keep people from congregating. Lynette Black is also working

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with the agricultural community. Environmental Health, led by Nicole Bailey, has shifted to work preparing for Phase 2 and helping businesses navigate that. We continue to do a lot of contact tracing and monitoring. The team is looking at what additional positions might be needed through the additional funding as they try to help staff meet the current needs along with regular program work.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said that she has received complaints from the public about restaurants not complying with the Governor's order. She said that she has referred those calls to Ms. Bailey. We do not have an enforcement mechanism but are trying to educate. The patrons may solve the problem by not patronizing businesses that are not complying. Ms. Thalhoffer agreed that the focus needs to be on education.

Chair Hege asked how the Phase 2 process is going. Ms. Thalhoffer replied that there are a lot of people trying to comply. Her concern is the lack of compliance with social distancing and wearing masks in the general public – you just have to go out to know that people are not taking it seriously. She said she is concerned that we will see some cases as a result. She said she tries to remind people that the virus has not changed; it was our modified behavior that kept it at bay.

Chair Hege asked how we can message or do more to encourage people to comply. Ms. Thalhoffer responded that we need to keep after messaging. Ms. Campbell has been working to do that. In addition, Prevention Coordinator Debby Jones is working on a campaign "I wear my mask for \_\_\_\_\_."

Dr. McDonnell added that this evening, Public Health will be meeting with faith-based leaders to give them guidance and ask them to help carry this message. Facebook posts don't really change people's behaviors, but hearing from someone they trust and respect will.

Ms. Thalhoffer went on to say that those in leadership positions for the response need to walk the walk. She reported that she has been approached by people asking why so many doctors and nurses are out without masks. She said she has reached out to MCMC to ask them to carry that message to staff – they need to lead by example.

Chair Hege asked if there are any challenges related to a shortage of masks. Ms. Thalhoffer replied that she has seen masks available pretty broadly – even in the retail stores.

Commissioner Kramer said he got a phone call yesterday concerning the mask issue in relationship to the seasonal work force. Public Health talks about the education side. Perhaps Unified Command needs to carry the message to that population.

Ms. Campbell reported that they have distributed both cloth and disposable masks

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to all orchardists requesting them. There has been a lot of education for orchardists and they are using that information for worker orientation. They have been provided signs to post throughout their orchards and YouTube videos are available in English and Spanish along with a marketing campaign for essential workers. We need everyone to take responsibility in keeping our community safe. Spanish language radio is also doing a lot of work in getting that message out.

Ms. Campbell continued by saying that \$30 million is coming from the State and directed toward the agricultural industry. Wasco County Planners Will Smith and Daniel Dougherty along with Extension Service District Agent Dr. Ashley Thompson are working to get that information out to our local community to help them provide resources such as porta potties, cots and washing stations. They have to apply directly. There will be a public service announcement as well as direct calls.

Ms. Thalhoffer pointed out that our spike in cases has not been migrant workers – it has been year-round residents. We need to be careful about making assumptions. We are going to see this in congregate work settings. Everyone needs to comply including our year-round residents.

Chair Hege asked if we could go backwards as a result and can we request that stores require masks.

Dr. McDonnell replied that businesses must require employees to wear masks. She said that direction from the state is not always clear as it is in the to-be-determined category. They are trying to alleviate the economic burden and they do not want to go backwards. Public Health is in the education business, not the enforcement business – that is the direction from Oregon Health Authority. If workers feel like they are not being protected, OSHA is the oversight agency.

Chair Hege asked if there are exceptions for wearing masks such as anxiety disorders. Dr. McDonnell replied that there are but it is the minority – most are just choosing not to wear the mask.

Ms. Thalhoffer related that she had a conversation with Human Resources at Fred Meyer after seeing many employees wearing masks improperly or not at all. They were very gracious and now have a monitor going around the store to make sure people are wearing masks appropriately.

Chair Hege asked if a worker can maintain that 6 foot radius, do they still have to wear a mask. Dr. McDonnell replied that the guidance is a little squishy; if you are public facing employee, you should wear a mask all the time.

Commissioner Kramer explained that he is not making assumptions but wants everyone to be safe. We may have a breakdown in communication; if so, what do we need to do to address that – more resource; bigger team? If we need to do

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something, let's get after it and get it done.

Vice-Chair Schwartz said she thinks we have powerful, political forces working against us and she is not sure how we can counter that. She stated that personally, she does not feel safe in the grocery store and so has modified her behavior in regard to when she goes and what stores she shops. She said that if she goes into a business and the proprietor is not wearing a mask, she leaves. She said that her husband has been approached twice and ridiculed for wearing a mask. She said that it will help if we do our business where there is compliance.

Chair Hege opened the floor to public comment.

Rodger Nichols commented that part of the problem is that the message that got out early was that the mask protects the wearer – we need to message that it is to protect others.

Kate Wilson said that there is a lot of social media saying that wearing a mask is government subversion – tyranny is the word they are using. That is a problem, especially in this climate of civil unrest. It impacts decision-making.

Chair Hege said he has seen comments about large family groups shopping together – it is preferable to send one member to do the shopping.

Ms. Wilson thanked everyone for all they do to get the message out to support the health and welfare of the community.

Commissioner Kramer commented that it is important to remind the citizens that this is a non-partisan Board – it is our job to serve everyone in the community. We care about everyone and we are doing the best job we can.

Ms. Campbell observed that one of the things Public Health does is prevention. There is a supply of masks for those who are having trouble finding them. At the march last weekend, Public Health handed out masks and judging by the pictures that were taken, a large majority of people were wearing them. She said that Public Health also has kits with masks and educational materials that they can share; contact Public Health or Lynette Black at the Extension Office to make arrangements.

Chair Hege reported that he went to the eye doctor yesterday where they had a process for accessing care – they took a temperature at the door, noted who was entering and were cleaning pens, etc. They were doing a good job. He commented that we may not get 100% compliance, but hope that most are doing the right thing.

Chair Hege shared a question from the chat regarding the possibility of posting signs that encourage compliance at the entrance to retail establishments. Dr.

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McDonnell said that it is a good idea; Environmental Health is reaching out and can follow up on that idea.

Vice-Chair Schwartz echoed Ms. Wilson's comments regarding the negative rhetoric on social media around the wearing of masks. She said that we need to continue to message the importance of wearing masks and lead by example. Chair Hege added that Mid-Columbia Medical Center needs to help lead that charge. Ms. Thalsofer agreed, saying that we are a small community and we need to protect each other by wearing masks in public.

Chair Hege asked if there were any further questions for Public Health. There were none.

Forest Service Area Manager Lynn Burditt reported that not much has changed since last week. Klickitat County opened for camping; Memaloose opened yesterday. Oregon parks had been cancelling camping reservations two weeks out; those who have reservations will now be able to use them. Viento and Wyatt will be opening as there is more ability to manage people at those sites. Things along the Lower Deschutes remain the same with safety measures in place. They are looking at opening Dog Mountain next week – that has been one of the more challenging sites. Over all, they hear that people are doing well at the open sites – dispersing appropriately. Like Public Health, the Forest Service is not a policing agency; they are trying to educate the public about how to use the facilities safely and providing guidelines. She said they are still having conversations about the waterfall corridor and how they might safely open it to the public. That would increase traffic mostly in Hood River and Skamania Counties. They are also looking at how they might open the Multnomah Falls concessionaire – it could be a month before that happens. Overnight stay restrictions have been lifted in Hood River – most of the hotel messaging has been good. For recreation, they are still messaging that the gorge is in transition . . . give us time. She encouraged Public Health, Law Enforcement and Commissioners to continue to engage in the bi-state conversations around opening recreation.

Chair Hege asked for any questions or comments. There were none.

Commissioner Kramer noted that the Board received communication Monday afternoon that he would like to add to the discussion list for next week's Board Session. There was no objection.

Ms. Wilson said that based on comments last week. Lane County has come out with a resolution on their support of Black Lives Matter. With all the feelings of fear and anger running through the county, she said she thinks it is important that the Wasco County Board of Commissioners consider that action as well. We need to come together as a county. She said she looks forward to hearing further.

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Chair Hege said that there is a regular Commission meeting next week. He encouraged everyone to go out and do the right thing and encourage friends and neighbors to do so as well.

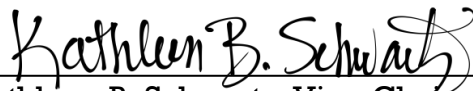
Chair Hege adjourned the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

Wasco County  
Board of Commissioners



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Scott C. Hege, Board Chair



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Kathleen B. Schwartz, Vice-Chair



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Steven D. Kramer, County Commissioner