



**WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION
AUGUST 26, 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

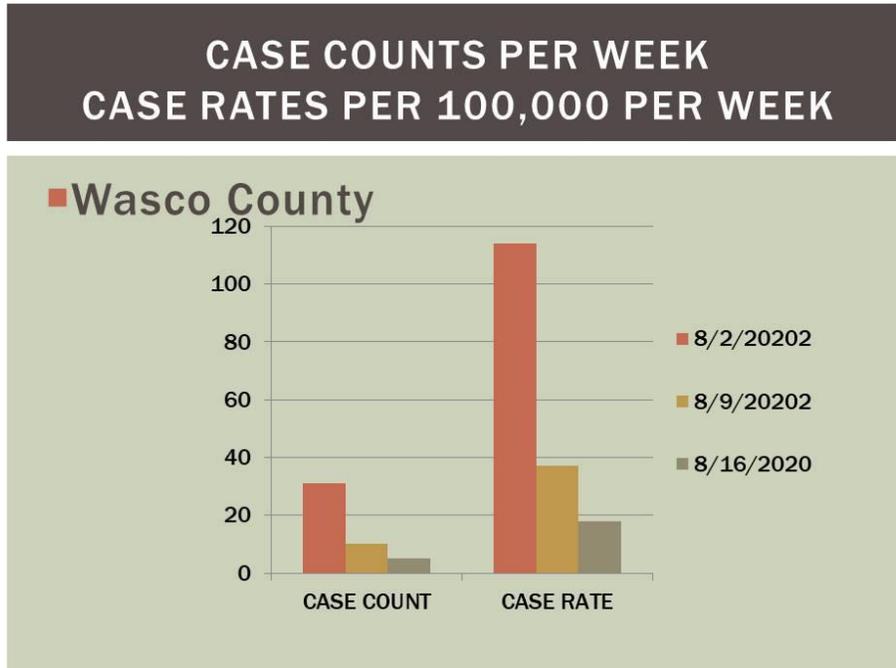
Chair Hege opened the session at 9:00 a.m. He announced that there has been a fatality related to the White River Fire. He expressed condolences to the family of the pilot who lost his life fighting the fire.

Dr. Mimi McDonnell reviewed a power point presentation as follows:

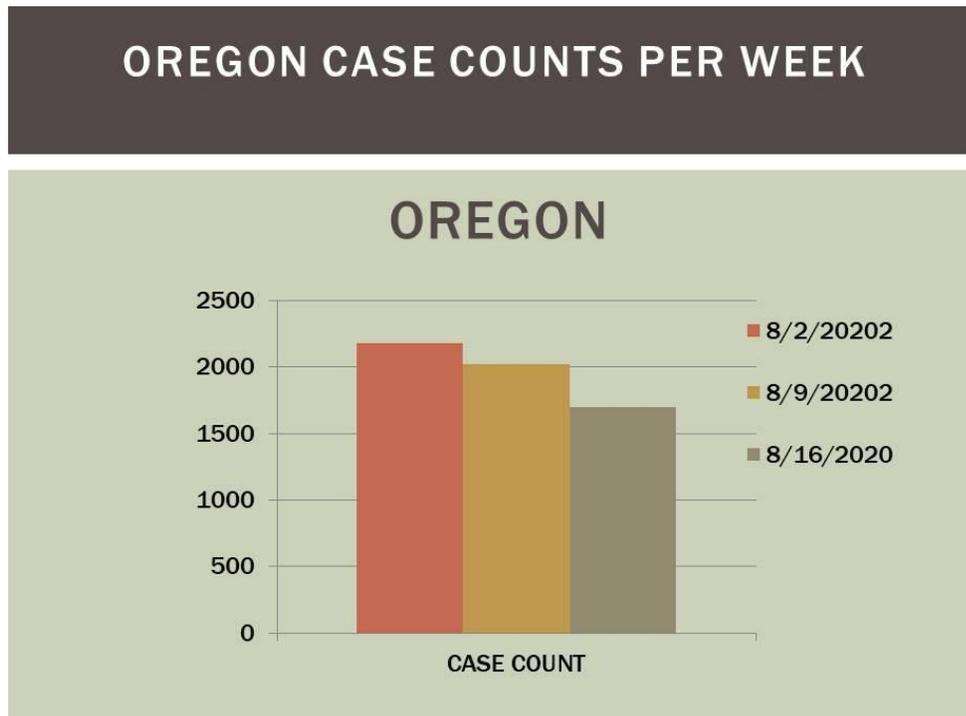
**COUNTY DATA TOTAL CASES TO DATE
RECOVERED CASES**

■ Wasco		
■ Total		207
■ Recovered		138
■ Sherman		
■ Total		16
■ Recovered		8
■ Gilliam		
■ Total		4
■ Recovered		3

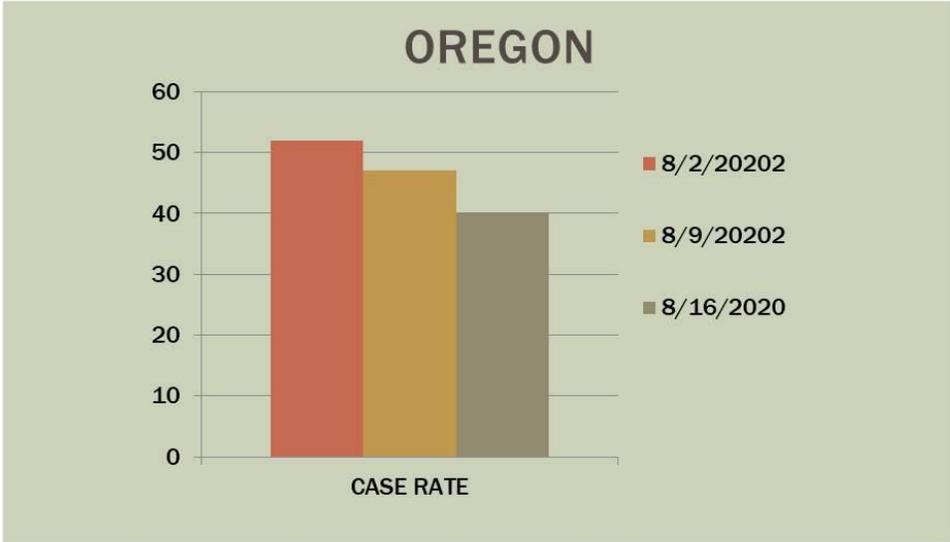
Dr. McDonnell reviewed the numbers on the slide above which show the totals for the 3 counties since the beginning of the pandemic.



Dr. McDonnell explained that the case counts and rates have dropped significantly in the last 3 weeks. That is very good news and will impact our ability to open schools.



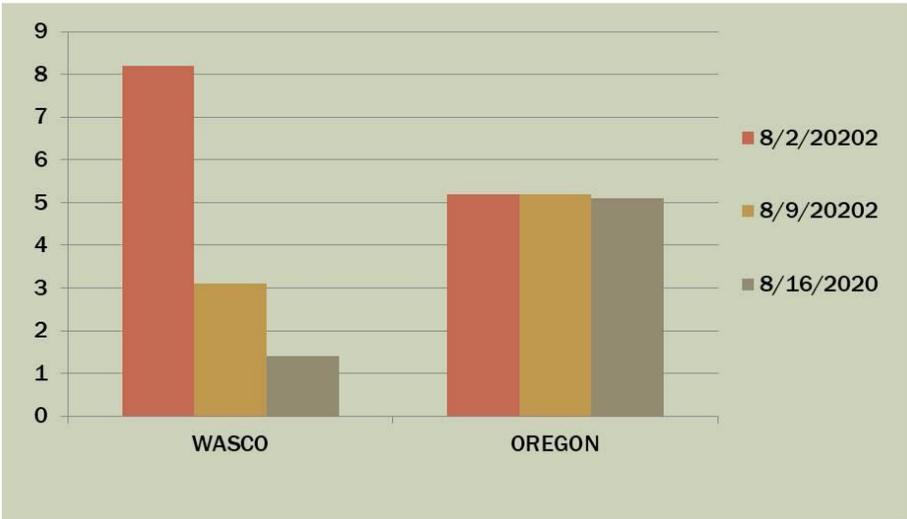
CASE RATES PER 100,000 PER WEEK



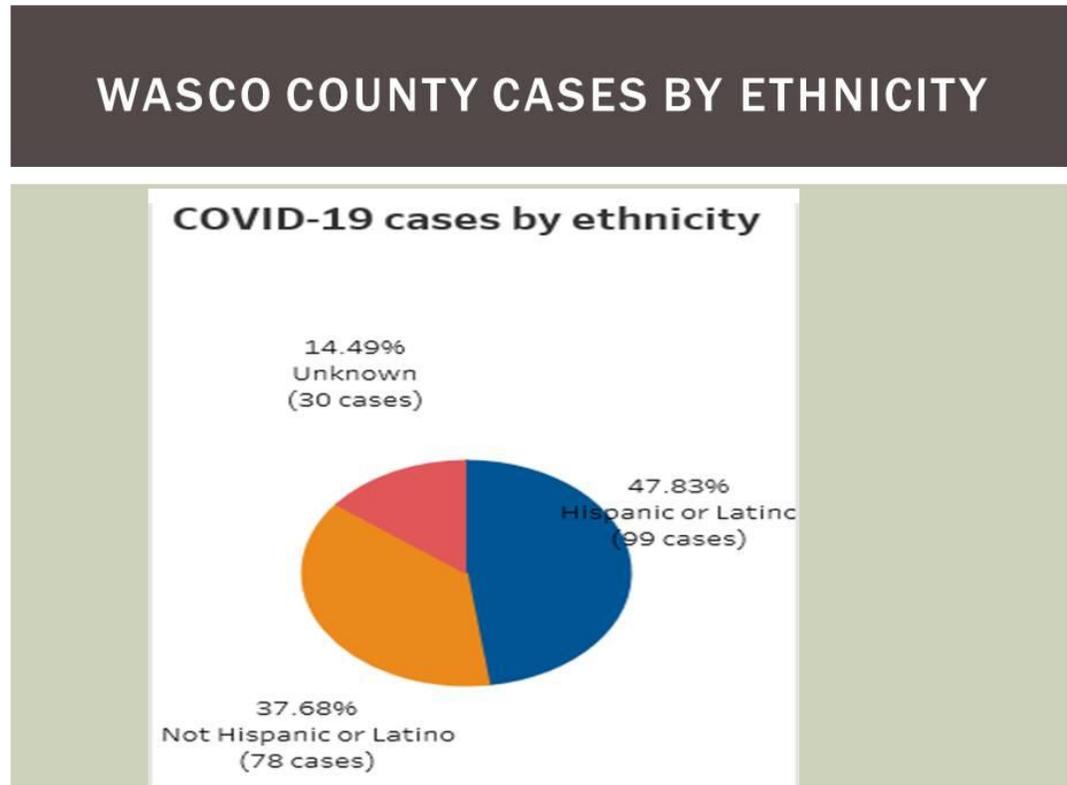
Regarding the two slides above, Dr. McDonnell said that it is encouraging to see that the state numbers are also trending down. They are bigger numbers so they do not move as quickly, nevertheless, they are moving in the right direction and very exciting.

For case rates, as they relate to in-person instruction, we are looking for the rate to fall below 10 per 100,000. For the week of August 16th the state was at 40 per 100,000. The decline in the numbers is the result of all the work being done and the response by the citizens.

TEST PERCENT POSITIVE BY WEEK



The slide above illustrates the percent of tests that have been positive in the past 3 weeks for Wasco County and the State of Oregon. Cases are going down and that is not because we are not testing people; we are testing adequately – especially here in Wasco County. We need the rate to be less than 5%. In Wasco County it is easily less than 5%; last week it was 1.4% which is great news. In the State, we are not quite there yet, for the week of August 16th it was 5.1%.



Dr. McDonnell said she keeps the slide above in the presentation every week as a reminder. She expressed her gratitude for The Next Door representatives who are here to talk about what is being done to help the over-represented populations. The slide does not include all over-represented groups but is a snapshot of the Latinx population in Wasco County.

The following slide outlines the metrics needed in order to hold in-person instruction for grades 4-12 in schools with an enrollment of greater than 250. Dr. McDonnell commented that it will be tough to meet these standards.

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION WASCO SCHOOLS >250 ENROLLMENT GRADES 4-12

- County Metrics- to be met 3 weeks in a row
 - Case rate ≤ 10 cases/100,000/week
 - Test positivity $\leq 5\%$ in the preceding 7 days
- State metric
 - Test positivity $\leq 5\%$ in the preceding 7 days

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION WASCO COUNTY GRADES K-3

- County case rate $\leq 30/100,000/week$ for 3 weeks
- Test positivity $\leq 5\%$ for 3 weeks
- No confirmed cases of COVID-19 among school staff or students in the preceding 14 days

The slide above outlines the metrics for in-person instruction for grades kindergarten through 3rd grade. Staff, students and their families are being

scrupulous in order to meet the metric of no cases among that population in the preceding 14 days – not traveling unnecessarily, not meeting in large groups, etc.

For smaller schools it will be a little easier as shown in the slide below.

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION WASCO SCHOOLS \leq 250 ENROLLMENT

- Total county cases in the past 3 weeks $<$ 30
- No community spread

GOOD NEWS!

- Week of 8/16/- 8/22, there was not community spread of COVID-19 in Wasco County
- Impacts many schools in Wasco County
- Also impacts Sherman County School District
- If trend continues for 2 additional weeks, schools and school districts MAY begin some bringing students in for in-person learning starting September 8

Dr. McDonell explained that even if the standards are met, the schools may choose to extend remote learning to make sure all the bugs are worked out and everyone has access and things are going well as they transition to more in-person learning.

The following slide outlines the work being done to prepare for the influenza season as well as anticipating the eventual distribution of COVID-19 vaccines when

they become available.

MORE GOOD NEWS!

- OHA markedly increasing access to influenza vaccine 2020-2021
- OHA unveiled a state-wide strategy for increasing COVID-19 testing capability
- Plans underway at state and local levels for eventual COVID-19 vaccine distribution

The good news does not mean we can forget about COVID-19; we need to keep on doing what we have been doing.

Chair Hege stated that Commissioner Schwartz could not be here today as she is participating in interviews for an Executive Director at North Central Public Health District.

Chair Hege asked what it means to not have community spread. Dr. McDonell replied that it is a vague term and depends upon what each local Public Health Department feels is the appropriate mix of county resources, percent positivity and case rates. All of that combined with where the cases are coming from will inform that decision.

Chair Hege said that a lot of people thought that as the seasonal work force moved out of the county, the over-represented Latinx percentages would decline but that has not been the case. Dr. McDonell replied that there was a population that came in from out of state that did increase the numbers. What the chart shows is a total percentage. We do know that a lot of the exposure comes at workplaces and that

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work environment impacts exposure. We do have a fair number of residents that work in the agricultural sector. Hood River has pear harvest coming soon.

Chair Hege asked why our numbers were so much better last week and what can be the expectation moving forward. He said that he understands that we need to keep doing what we have been doing but is there anything else we can do? Dr. McDonnell responded that it might be interesting to look at the timeline of the virus related to the new guidelines. In the beginning, our numbers were low; people relaxed and the numbers went up. Mandates were instituted and the numbers are coming down. Summer weather had more people out as well. In a small county like ours, one big party can have a tremendous impact on our numbers. Businesses have put up Plexiglas and have masks available. She said that there are factors that she may not know about.

Chair Hege noted that there is a lag time in the data – what we do today, shows up weeks later. The primary goal is to get kids back in school. Dr. McDonnell said that, globally, evidence shows that when they try to go back before rates are below 10 per 100,000, there are outbreaks. Our number was 18 for this past week. For grades 4 and up, it has to be at 10 or less per 100,000.

Chair Hege noted that the State is at 40 per 100,000. The Governor is asking for our help and support. Commissioner Kramer thanked Public Health for all the good work. Chair Hege also expressed his appreciation.

Chair Hege opened the floor for questions or comment. There were none.

Forest Service Area Manager Lynn Burditt said that there are no real changes from last week. They are monitoring at Multnomah Falls where visitation has been lower than expected. They did have to close the gates once on Saturday and once on Sunday and had people waiting in line for 10-12 minutes. The ticketing system will start this weekend; information on that will be released tomorrow. The reservation system will be on rec.gov and will include a \$1 administrative fee. West bound entry into the lot is open with no problems reported. They will continue to monitor over Labor Day weekend.

Chair Hege said that he noticed that the garbage problem has spread out to the wilderness areas. Users need to be responsible about packing out whatever they pack in.

The Next Door, Inc. Executive Director Janet Hamada explained that The Next Door has been a social service organization for about 50 years operating in Wasco, Sherman, Wheeler and Gilliam Counties since 1984. The main office is located in The Dalles and houses 30 programs. In the past 5 months, they have started 10 new

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programs and are grateful to have been able to pivot and respond to the pandemic. Having community relationships already in place has been critical to their success. Claire Rawson has risen to the challenge and it is an honor to work with her.

Health Promotions Services Coordinator Claire Rawson said that she works on seasonal and farm worker outreach. She said she had the privilege to be part of collaboration across the board. She was asked to focus on PPE, food access, housing and workplace safety. Work groups, composed of representatives from all counties, convene weekly. NCPHD has been instrumental in the work – Dr. McDonell and Interim Executive Director Shellie Campbell always respond and have decreased the impact locally. We cannot do everything, but are doing all that we can think to do. Despite all the efforts, people are still suffering from the virus.

Ms. Rawson went on to say that one of the barriers they encounter is that people are afraid to report symptoms, fearing loss of employment or immigration inquiries. It is difficult to erase that ingrained fear. No one is safe unless we are all safe; we need to address this in all our populations. The team has conducted outreach through various stores where they provide free masks, hand sanitizer and informational handouts. They facilitate food bank deliveries, air radio spots and work with faith leaders to educate. One Community Health conducts orchard visits. The team has created videos to share and help workers apply for quarantine funds and unemployment for those outside the state system.

Ms. Rawson explained that contact tracing calls incite fear and anxiety so they have written a script for local use and hope to have it used statewide. She noted that recently the Board of Commissioners aired a radio message; she thanked them for doing it in both English and Spanish. She also thanked the Board for the care and interest they have shown. She said it is that care and the community collaboration that gives her hope.

Chair Hege asked what Ms. Rawson believes will be the biggest challenge going forward – the one that will have the greatest impact. Ms. Rawson replied that the answer changes weekly. One challenge concerning is the sustainability of some of the programs. Housing and wage relief are scheduled to end in September and December, just as the flu season is hitting. The pandemic is not ending soon; losing support systems is concerning. The accessibility of testing is concerning. One Community Health has been a great partner but we do not have enough people to administer the tests. There is also fear around what the results might mean; discrimination is another fear for those who may test positive.

Ms. Hamada agreed. She observed that The Next Door will spend at least \$10,000 per building to improve air quality. She pointed out that they have two relatively new buildings with only 70 workers. Others, such as packing houses, may not have

the resources to make those improvements. They are challenged by the OSHA regulations and how they can comply before harvest begins.

Chair Hege said that he understands the fear and expressed concern about the resultant under-reporting.

Commissioner Kramer thanked The Next Door for all the work they have done.

City Councilwoman Darcy Long-Curtis commented that the schools face the same deterrents to reporting.

Chair Hege asked if there are any resources that would help make programs more sustainable.

Mr. Stone said that there are a lot of resources out there, both state and federal programs. He noted that you have to watch carefully as they come out almost on a daily basis. He suggested that people think creatively about the funding streams and how they can be used in collaboration with other agencies to leverage funds for the greater good. From a County and Public Health standpoint, we have been tapping into the state funding. We have not tapped into the federal funding – it is difficult and an unknown as far as reimbursement. He said that if there is something we can help with, he is open to having those conversations about how we might leverage each other's access.

Ms. Hamada agreed that there are a lot of resources; like everything, you have to know the right angle, proposal and collaboration. She said she will look forward to talking with Mr. Stone about possible collaborations.

Kate Wilson asked if there is a need for volunteers. Ms. Hamada replied that they are always looking for mentors for kids on their waiting list – the program used to be Big Brothers/Big Sisters. They also need help with kids for mental health support; they have been totally isolated and it is rough for them. That is a long-term volunteer commitment. Spanish speakers are needed. She said they also have positions open for temporary employment. There is a volunteer coordinator; you can obtain more information at www.nextdoorin.org.

Mr. Stone stated that Unified Command is also using volunteers for PPE distribution, tracking, etc.

Chair Hege said he has been hearing that people should be getting their flu shots earlier this year. Dr. McDonnell said the impetus for early vaccination is to get them done before there is a COVID vaccine so as not to overload the system. October is about the time the flu vaccine is available on a large scale. The flu vaccine is not

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perfect, but it is a numbers game – you certainly do not want to have both the flu and COVID at the same time.

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

Chair Hege thanked The Next Door for providing so much information and doing great work.

ESD Superintendent Pat Sublette said that the school districts are all working hard and have turned in their blueprints for distance learning. Teachers are working hard toward that and are excited about the numbers going down so we might get the K-3rd kids in the classrooms. She said that the changing guidance is challenging; it is great as it gets more specific, but often causes them to have to go back and readdress plans.

Chair Hege opened the floor to public comment/questions. A citizen announced that the Hood River Shelter Services has received funding for 10 COVID warming places.

Chair Hege closed the session at 9:54 a.m.

Wasco County
Board of Commissioners



Scott C. Hege, Board Chair



Kathleen B. Schwartz, Vice-Chair



Steven D. Kramer, County Commissioner