



News Release

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

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Board of Trustees Reinstates Public Health Emergency on Umatilla Indian Reservation Due to Spike in COVID Cases

MISSION, OR – The Board of Trustees, the elected body of leaders for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, has unanimously approved a resolution to once again declare a Public Health Emergency on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. This is due to the fact that the population served by Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center is experiencing a drastic spike in COVID-19 cases. At least seventy-two positive cases have been recorded this week at Yellowhawk as of noon today.

“This emergency declaration is needed to help protect our community. We knew that a surge in positive COVID-19 cases was possible following the Pendleton Round-Up. What we’ve seen from this past week is that the cases have spiked quickly,” noted Aaron Hines, Interim CEO of Yellowhawk. “The Incident Command Team will work diligently to implement measures that protect our families, friends, co-workers, and community at-large. However, it also incumbent of all us as individuals to do our part. Please make sure you’re heeding the safety recommendations. Wear a mask, social distance and get tested when necessary. Please consider getting the COVID-19 vaccine. We’re currently at a 47% vaccination rate. Our goal is to reach 70%,” Hines added.

The declaration of a Public Health Emergency on the Umatilla Indian Reservation has numerous effects, including activating the CTUIR’s Emergency Operations Plan and the formation of an Incident Command Team to rapidly respond to the emergency to protect the public. The Incident Command Team will be led by Yellowhawk as the Public Health Authority on the Reservation, and will also consist of the Office of the Executive Director, the Chief Executive Officers for Wildhorse Resort and Casino, Nixyaawii Community Financial Services, Cayuse Holdings, and the Chair, Treasurer, and General Council Chairman for the Board of Trustees. The resolution declaring the public health emergency also authorizes Yellowhawk to engage the federal government, particularly the United States Department of Health and Human Services, in order to request resources or waive or modify certain federal funding requirements related to health insurance, the use of federal property, and the temporary reassignment of federally-funded Tribal personnel in order to address the emergency situation.

The Incident Command Team will begin to meet immediately to determine the further steps that are necessary in order to stem the increase in cases and protect members of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and surrounding community. Reporting on the deliberations of the Incident Command Team will be conveyed to the full Board of Trustees and meetings will be recorded.

Until the Incident Command Team issues further guidance, please continue to thoroughly wash your hands often, maintain physical distance from people from outside your household and wear your mask. Finally, if you have not yet gotten vaccinated, please consider doing so with any of the three widely available, effective, and safe options (Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Johnson and Johnson).

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is made up of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Tribes, formed under the Treaty of 1855 signed in the Walla Walla Valley. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the treaty rights guaranteed under federal statute.

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