



# County of Malheur

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

### **Malheur County will remain at Lower Risk despite rising COVID-19 cases**

Rising case numbers and test positivity rate are enough this week to push Malheur County up one level to Moderate Risk on the state's four-tier [risk assessment system](#), but a two-week caution period will allow the county to remain at Lower Risk until May 6, according to an [update](#) released today by the Governor's Office.

Malheur County is one of three counties in the state entering a two-week caution period. "The two-week caution period applies to counties facing backward movement. Counties that reduced their COVID-19 spread enough to move down in risk level in the previous two-week period, but see their numbers go back up in the next two-week period, are given a two-week caution period to re-focus efforts to drive back down creeping case numbers and give local businesses additional certainty on their plans for operating," today's update said.

A [Risk Levels Summary Table](#) also released today shows that during the two-week period from April 4 to April 17, Malheur County's case count was 27, up from 24 during the previous two-week period; case rate was 84.3, up from 74.9; and test positivity rate was 4.9%, up from 4.3% (adjusted down from 5.1% since initial reporting).

Malheur County Health Department Director Sarah Poe cautioned that Malheur County's steady rise in cases, coupled with a concerning low vaccine rate compared to the rest of the state, could result in increased outbreaks, illness, hospitalizations and deaths. Malheur County reported its first COVID-19-related death in three months this week. The county could also face risk level-related restrictions on businesses and activities.

"We are among a cluster of Eastern Oregon counties that are not doing that well with vaccinating. We're at about 2,300 per 10,000 people vaccinated. The only county that's doing worse than us is Umatilla," she said. "It's definitely concerning."

According to the Oregon Health Authority's [vaccination dashboard](#), Malheur County lags behind the statewide percentages of people vaccinated in all age groups. Also of concern is the disparity at the state level between those who identify as Hispanic/Latinx and other race and ethnic groups, shown [here](#). Hispanic/Latinx as a group is only 19.3% vaccinated with at least one dose, behind Blacks at 19.9%, American Indian/Alaska Natives at 21%, Asians at 30.9%, Whites at 34.8%, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders at 40.4%.

(MORE)

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Latinos make up about 34% of Malheur County's population, and while vaccine data based on race/ethnicity is not available from the state for counties like Malheur, where smaller populations could make such data stigmatizing, it is likely that local vaccine rates follow a similar trend.

“On a very practical, common sense level, we need the COVID-19 vaccines to prevent outbreaks and save lives. As a community, we value family and connection. Getting vaccinated protects the people you love and also helps keep our county open. There is no logical way for us to get out of this pandemic and back to normal life without the majority of our community immunized,” Poe said.

Gov. Brown last week said that as Oregonians face more contagious variants and increased spread of COVID-19, the best protection is getting vaccinated. “Until you, your family, your friends, and your neighbors are fully vaccinated, it's also critical that we all continue to wear masks, maintain physical distance, and stay home when sick.”

A complete list of counties and their associated risk levels is available [here](#).

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