Wasco County has seen a steady drop in COVID-19 cases over the past three weeks, and recently went five days without a positive case.

“It looks very good to have in-person learning in some of the schools in Wasco County in September, and if we continue on this trend, in all of them by October,” said Dr. Mimi McDonell, health officer for North Central Public Health District.

The schools all having worked hard to develop their plans in accordance with the Oregon Department of Education’s Ready Schools Safe Learners Blueprints, and they will be implementing many policies and procedures related to those blueprints.

Local schools with less than 250 students have different criteria to meet to allow in-person learning than schools with more than 250 students.

Under-250 schools are the elementary and high school in Maupin, Mosier Community School, Dufur School and St. Mary’s Academy in The Dalles and Riverbend Community School (formerly Wahtonka Charter School). Dufur School can fully separate grade groups and is considered under 250.
Over-250 schools are Chenowith, Colonel Wright and Dry Hollow elementaries in The Dalles as well as the middle school and high school in The Dalles.

Under-250 schools can go to in-person learning once no community spread is observed for three weeks in a row. There already has been one week with no community spread, McDonell said.

No community spread is defined locally as having a case rate of less than 30 cases per week per 100,000 population. It also includes other factors such as hospital capacity, test availability, and recent percent of test positivity. The county is doing well on those metrics also, McDonell said.

Wasco County’s case rate per 100,000 was 114 the week of Aug. 2, 37 the week of Aug. 9, and just 18 the week of Aug. 16. Total cases for those weeks were 31, 10 and 5, respectively.

Wasco County schools with a student population over 250 can return to in-person learning once the case rate is at or below 10 cases per 100,000 population, which translates to about 2.5 cases per week, for three weeks in a row, and the test positivity rate is 5 percent or less for three weeks in a row.

That test positivity rate has been met for several weeks now. The Aug. 16 week’s positivity rate was 1.4 percent and the week before it was 3.3 percent.

The larger schools are also tied to a statewide positivity rate of 5 percent or lower for three weeks in a row. Last week, the state’s positivity rate was 5.1 percent.

Schools below 250 are not tied to state test positivity rates.

Dufur and South Wasco County schools in Maupin will start online learning Sept. 14. Public schools in The Dalles start online Sept. 3. St. Mary’s Academy hopes to begin in-person classes as soon as Sept. 8, depending on how case counts go.

Sherman County School will begin classes online Sept. 8. Arlington School in Gilliam County will go online initially on Sept. 8. Only Condon School will be doing in-person classes, which start Sept. 8.