

Oregon hospitals prepare for a shortage of beds

Action could prevent COVID-19 cases from doubling every 6 days

By Jake Thomas
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — As the coronavirus continues to spread in Oregon, the state is on a path to run out of hospital beds particularly by next month without a significant slowing of the disease or drastic response by public health officials.

Gov. Kate Brown and her health team Monday afternoon announced new statewide restrictions while mapping out a plan to boost the capacity of hospitals to deal with the expected wave of patients infected with COVID-19.

She banned gatherings of 25 or more — a substantial change from earlier prohibitions of gatherings of 250 or more. She ordered restaurants and bars to stop sit-down dining, but allowed



Observer file photo

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them to provide delivery or takeout service.

“Isolation from our friends and neighbors is the only way to flatten the curve of transmission and get Oregon through this,”

Brown said.

State health officials revealed the results of modeling done by Oregon Health and Science University of how the pandemic virus will hit Oregon. They

repeated earlier forecasts of 75,000 infected Oregonians but added they expected the number of known cases to double every six days without strong action.

Dr. Dana Hargunani, the

chief medical officer for the Oregon Health Authority, starkly explained what would happen if a spike in cases can't be averted.

“We will not be able to save everyone,” Hargunani said.

She said physicians could face “heartbreaking decisions” as Oregon “a stark new phase” with the virus.

Dr. Renee Edwards, OHSU chief medical officer, said the modeling showed Oregon would need an additional 1,000 hospital beds and 400 intensive care unit beds to accommodate the surge. The state's 62 hospitals have 6,600 beds.

Edwards said that 20% of those who contract COVID-19 would require hospitalization.

Oregon needs to quickly add hospital beds across the state to cope.

She said OHSU, for example, could need 80 ICU beds for expected COVID-19 patients by mid-

April — double what it has.

“This happens to be near our current ICU capacity,” she said. “And on a normal day, our ICU is already full of Oregonians who need critical care, even without the COVID crisis.”

Brown said the state intended to “expand bed capacity by adding beds in non-hospital settings,” although she didn't elaborate.

Oregon has one of the lowest per-capita bed rates nationally. The state has just 1.6 hospital beds per 1,000 people, according to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

In Portland, Kaiser Permanente, Legacy Health, Providence Health and OHSU plan to operate as a single entity to build capacity, coordinate medical responses and prevent a shortage of hospital beds.

While the effort is based in the Portland area, Brown said it could function as a model for the rest of the state.

Coronavirus shutdown threatens jobs

By Christopher Rugaber and Tim Sullivan
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Millions of Americans holed up at home against the coronavirus Monday, with many of them thrown out of work until further notice, as authorities tightened the epic clampdown and the list of businesses forced to close across the U.S. extended to restaurants, bars, gyms and casinos.

With the U.S. economy shuddering to a halt, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plummeted nearly 3,000 points, or 13%, its biggest one-day fall in decades.

The rapid work stoppage had Americans fretting about their jobs and their savings, threatened to overwhelm unemployment benefit programs and heightened fears the U.S. is sliding into recession.

The number of infections in the U.S. climbed to about 3,800, with at least 70 deaths, nearly two-thirds of them in hard-hit Washington state.

Officials in six San Francisco Bay Area counties issued a “shelter-in-place” order affecting nearly 7 million people, requiring most residents to stay inside and venture out only for necessities for three weeks — the most drastic measure taken yet in the U.S. to curb the spread of the virus.

“The most important thing you can do is remain home as much as possible,” San Francisco Mayor London Breed said on Twitter. “There is no need to rush out for food or supplies, as these stores will remain open.”

The shutdowns touched every corner of the country: blackjack dealers in Las Vegas, theme park workers in Orlando, Florida, restaurant and bar employees nationwide, and winery workers in California. At least eight states called on all bars and restaurants to close at least part of the day. Casinos shut down in New Jersey.

Tyler Baldwin, a 29-year-old bartender at the Taproom in Seattle's Pike Place Market, one of the city's biggest tourist attractions, shut down early “so I can go home and start figuring out unemployment, food stamps, really whatever the next step to keep myself afloat.”

Truckers hauling goods from a port in Virginia are losing two to three days of work each week and just trying to hang on because cargo volume has dropped so much.

“It's a struggle just to survive right now, just to put food on the table,” said Nicole Sapienza, managing member of Coastwide Marine Services in



Photo by Andrew Harnik/The Associated Press

A woman wearing a mask walks through a terminal at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Monday in Arlington, Virginia.

Virginia.

About 82 million people, or three-fifths of the U.S. workforce, are hourly employees. Many of them won't get paid if they don't work. For those in a category that includes restaurant, hotel, amusement park, and casino workers, just one-third have access to paid sick leave, according to Wells Fargo.

Kevin Hassett, a former economic adviser to President Donald Trump, said on CNN “that the odds of a global recession are close to 100% right now” and predicted the U.S. could lose about 1 million jobs in April.

“If that happens you're looking at one of the biggest negative jobs numbers that we've ever seen,” he said. “Now, of course, that would hopefully reverse itself quickly if we get ahead of the curve on this.”

The economy appears to be decelerating at a much faster pace than in the 2008 financial crisis. If Hassett's forecast of job losses is accurate, that would be just two months after the government reported a healthy gain of 273,000 jobs.

“This is like an avalanche, it's all happening at once,” said Heidi Shierholz, senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute. “And no one knows how long it's going to last.”

With schools shut down for tens of millions of children, parents began using plans that included such as flash cards, online learning, dog walks and creativity sessions. Many did this while juggling work conference calls, emails and memos. Others scrambled to find child care.

Mathews Schroder was about to begin work as a host at SeaWorld Orlando but was notified that his start would be pushed back because of the shutdown of the resort area's major theme parks.

“I don't know when my next meal is going to be. I'm going to have to collect unemployment until I get notification about when I start,” Schroder said. Luckily, he can get health insurance through his wife's job at a Taco Bell.

The shutdowns were especially devastating for the many artists and service industry workers in New York who rely on nightlife and live paycheck to paycheck with meager benefits in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Ralph Anthony, a comic and actor in New York City, had two gigs canceled last week that cost him \$1,000 — money he intended to use to pay next month's bills.

“There's literally no work to go around,” said Anthony, 38. “You're living off your savings. You're liquidating your investment portfolio.”

In a letter to President Donald Trump and congressional leaders, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce called for swift legislation, including a three-month cancellation of some taxes and an expansion of loans to businesses, to “mitigate the potentially devastating economic effects.”

Governors in a number of states said they are growing increasingly alarmed by the widening economic damage and the effect on workers. Some announced changes to make it easier for people to collect unemployment benefits. Others accelerated programs to make loans available to more small businesses.

Yet some analysts worry that unemployment benefit systems could be overwhelmed by a flood of people seeking aid. In January 2009, at the height of the Great Recession, many online and phone systems for filing requests for unemployment crashed.

In fact, the website where businesses could

apply for Small Business Administration disaster loans crashed Monday.

The U.S. surgeon general, meanwhile, said the number of coronavirus cases in the United States has reached a level comparable to what disease-battered Italy recorded two weeks ago — a signal that infections are expected to rise in America. Italy is reporting an estimated 25,000 cases and more than 1,800 deaths.

“We are at a critical inflection point in this country, people,” Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams told Fox News. “When you look at the projections, there's every chance that we could be Italy.”

A healthy volunteer became the first participant in a clinical trial of an experimental vaccine against the virus, receiving a dose at a research institute in Washington state. Public officials cautioned, however, that it will still take a year to 18 months to fully test and approve any vaccine.

Across the country, health officials, politicians and business leaders talked about “social distancing” and “flattening the curve,” or encouraging people to avoid others so as to slow the spread of the virus and keep U.S. hospitals from being overwhelmed with a sudden deluge of patients.

Most people who come down with the disease have mild symptoms, but it can be deadly for some, especially the elderly and those with underlying health problems. Most people infected with the virus recover in a matter of weeks.

Around the country, people had to figure out how entertain themselves now that nearly all social gatherings have been banned, canceled or strongly discouraged. Some people planned to watch TV, catch up on chores such as cleaning out the basement, exercise at home, do more cooking or read.

NEWS IN BRIEF

BMCC moves most of its classes online through spring term

PENDLETON — Despite a statewide closure in K-12 schools due to coronavirus, Blue Mountain Community College will stay open, albeit with some added precautions.

In a press release, BMCC announced it was pressing ahead with winter term finals and the upcoming spring term.

Starting Monday, the college will shift as many of its classes as possible to an online format. For winter term finals, instructors will have the discretion on whether to hold a final or not.

For classes that still require a physical presence from students, BMCC will encourage these classes to practice social distancing procedures.

In a statement, BMCC President Dennis Bailey-Fougner echoed what other local institutions have said about COVID-19 by calling its actions “unprecedented.”

“The decision to move to virtual instruction was not made lightly,” he said. “The goal is to minimize the need to gather in large groups and spend prolonged time in close proximity with each other in spaces, such as classrooms, the library, and the student union. This action is consistent with the recommendations of leading health officials on how to limit the spread of COVID-19 and is also consistent with similar decisions made by a number of our peer institutions. The campus will remain open and operations will continue with appropriate measures to protect the health of the community.”

BMCC will retain this approach through the end of its spring term, but could make updates to its plan as it consults with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

On Friday, BMCC and the Northwest Athletic Conference also canceled all sports activities through April 13.

Oregon Zoo announces temporary closure beginning Tuesday

PORTLAND — The Oregon Zoo will be temporarily closing effective Tuesday, the latest closure in the state in the effort to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The zoo will remain closed through at least

April 8, according to the press release, and said it would “provide updates based on guidance from local and state authorities.”

Zoo staff responsible for critical operations, as well as animal-care teams, will continue to work onsite, the release said. Other employees will work from home if they can.

Rights groups sue for detainee release over virus concerns

SEATTLE — Immigrant rights groups on Monday sued the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to force the release of detainees at its Washington state jail who are at high risk from the coronavirus.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Seattle by the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Washington, and the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project on behalf of people detained at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma.

It wasn't clear how many detainees at ICE's 1,575-bed Northwest Tacoma facility might be considered high-risk. Health officials say among those particularly susceptible to COVID-19 are people older than 60, pregnant, or who have underlying conditions, such as a weakened immune system or heart or lung disease. Those in detention are especially vulnerable to contagious outbreaks.

“These are not normal circumstances, and the heightened risk of serious harm to people in detention from COVID-19 is clear,” Eunice Cho, a senior staff attorney at the ACLU's National Prison Project, said in a statement.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

In a statement, ICE said it was paying close attention to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Consistent with federal partners, ICE is taking important steps to further safeguard those in our care,” the statement said. “As a precautionary measure, we are temporarily suspending social visitation in all detention facilities.”

The agency also said it was working with health officials to determine if detainees might need additional testing or monitoring.

— EO Media Group