

COVID-19

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That rate of spread would lead to an average of 1,780 new cases and 85 hospitalizations per day by Jan. 26. Notably, the Oregon Health Authority’s prediction does not account for a possible rise in the infection rate due to spread during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays.

“These projections would look even more dire if the actual transmission level increased beyond 1.29 around Christmas and New Year’s Eve,” the OHA stated in its modeling report.

The OHA’s modeling also does not account for any potential dampening effects of COVID-19 vaccination in the state. While vaccination efforts have lagged far behind earlier goals, 119,979 people in Oregon’s high-risk populations had received at least one injection of a vaccine as of Tuesday, Jan. 12.

The Health Authority’s modeling also projected a potential scenario in which people became more adherent to COVID-19 prevention measures, such as mask wearing and social distancing. In that scenario, transmission rates dropped to 0.9 and new daily cases by Jan. 26 would average out at 1,400.

That scenario appears to be unlikely, however. Local daily cases in the new year jumped back into double-digit figures and statewide daily new cases have at times approached the 2,000 mark once again, indicating a post-holiday spike is likely occurring.



Abby Stone-breaker/Grande Ronde Hospital, File
Jaymi George, a registered nurse at Grande Ronde Hospital, receives an injection of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Wednesday, Dec. 23, 2020, from infection preventionist Amy Miles. New modeling of the spread of COVID-19 in Oregon projects a steep rise in infections and deaths over the coming months.

While the OHA’s modeling does not extend past the end of January, modeling from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation reaches into the coming months, and it predicts an outcome startling and dark.

It is important to note the IHME new daily case

totals are estimates of all COVID-19 cases in Oregon, including those not tested. The OHA totals include only cases of COVID-19 that have resulted in a positive test or are presumptive positive cases, meaning there is a significant disparity between the numbers each organization produces.

The IHME’s modeling of what it calls the “most likely” scenario predicts Oregon’s death toll could more than triple from 1,667 on Jan. 12 to 5,011 by April 1.

That scenario also projects the pandemic will hit extremes previously unheard of in Oregon

during February, with average daily new infections reaching 8,763 by Feb. 7. The state’s all-time high for daily new infections reported by the OHA stood at 2,176 as of Monday, Jan. 11.

The same modeling put the average number of new cases projected for Jan. 9 at 1,814, which is relatively close to the number of cases the Oregon Health Authority reported that day at 1,643, though daily cases tapered off to 939 by Jan. 11.

The Institute also projected that demand for intensive care unit beds in Oregon due to COVID-19 would exceed the state’s capacity on Jan. 16, with demand rising until late February and continuing to exceed availability until March 17.

The IMHE model puts the number of ICU beds available to take COVID-19 patients at 210, which is far below the actual number of total ICU beds in Oregon — 695, according to tracking data from the OHA. However, not all of those beds will be able to accept COVID-19 patients, and as of Tuesday, only 127 of those beds statewide were unoccupied and staffed, according to the OHA.

A different scenario that IHME modeled, which accounts for a rapid rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine to those at high risk, predicts fewer deaths from the disease. However, spread in that scenario remains extreme.

Under the rapid rollout to high-risk populations scenario, which appears to

track closely with statewide vaccination efforts thus far, the model projected Oregon would tally 8,650 average daily COVID-19 infections by Feb. 6 and a total of 4,585 deaths by April 1.

“As compared to a no vaccine scenario, rapid rollout (of a COVID-19 vaccine) targeting high-risk individuals only could save 1,300 lives,” IHME stated in its modeling report.

In the IHME’s worst-case scenario, state mandates were eased, resulting in a projected death toll in Oregon of 6,876 by April 1 and 15,744 average daily new infections reached by Feb. 11.

The IHME’s best-case scenario came in the form of an immediate jump to “universal mask use,” in which 95% of Oregonians complied fully with proper mask-wearing procedures. In that scenario, daily infections held steady before beginning to taper off in early February. Current mask use was measured at 76%.

While the projections from the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation are dire, it should be noted that the Oregon Health Authority maintains that modeling is extremely challenging. Additionally, changes in each of the factors that drive the spread of the disease — mask wearing, vaccination, social distancing — are all modeled separately, meaning that changes in more than one (for example, if vaccination were to speed up as people wore masks more diligently) would result in a different outcome.

REACTIONS

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aid of social media, has not hidden his antagonistic side throughout his presidency.

“Trump has been out front about who he is. He has shown us who he is,” Stone said.

She said this makes politicians and others feel

free to also let their worst instincts to take over.

Stone also said she thinks the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced people to stay home, has sparked violent outbursts such as the events on Jan. 6.

“The pandemic put people in a pressure cooker,” Stone said. “It isolated people with others who think the same way.”

Some have said the riot

in the Capitol is representative of American character. President-elect Joe Biden said this is not who we are, and Stone said she hopes he is right.

“I would like to believe that people are good,” said Stone, a retired psychotherapist and rehabilitation therapist who moved to La Grande in 2005 after retiring.

She said she hopes in the

future people will interact more with those who have different viewpoints and become more open-minded in the process.

“I have liberal and conservative friends. It makes me a better person,” Stone said. “We need to talk to people who are not like ourselves. Doing so gives me a view I wouldn’t get if I am with people who think only as I do.”

VACCINES

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care partners,” said the governor. “The Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon National Guard have already begun working with hospitals, pharmacies, and local public health partners to ensure Oregon seniors

and educators have ready access to a vaccine.”

Brown urged those who would become eligible on Jan. 23 to refrain from calling their health care providers with questions about getting vaccinated, as the news came suddenly and details about distribution are forthcoming.

“Now, more than ever,

I am determined to ensure that communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 have access to a vaccine: Oregon’s Black, Indigenous, tribal, Latino, Latina, and Latinx, Pacific Islander, and communities of color,” Brown said. “Reaching educators and individuals aged 65 and

older from these communities is absolutely critical, as we strive to achieve equitable vaccine distribution in each phase of this process.”

Additional details are expected to be announced on Friday. Look for more details on COVID-19 vaccination in the Saturday, Jan. 16, edition of The Observer.

BLM

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“If they are OK with me making a report, I would like to do that,” she said.

Carmichael is wasting no time, however, in trying to find out who is responsible.

“I am actively seeking information from people, if they happened to see anything posted on social media, hear of anything about the vandalism,” she said. “It is a small town, but

it’s also located right on the freeway.”

The vandalism of the Black Lives Matter billboard follows the insurrection at the United States Capitol building Wednesday, Jan. 6. Five people died as a result of the riot, including one United States Capitol Police officer whom the mob dragged and beat.

Conspiracy theories circulating on social media are that some accused Black Lives Matter and

Antifa supporters posed as supporters of President Donald Trump during the riot. Myriad outlets, among them the Associated Press, Politifact, Reuters and USA Today, quickly debunked those claims. Fox News also acknowledged there is no evidence to support those conspiracy theories.

Carmichael said the insurrection may have contributed to the vandal’s motivation, but the hate for the Black Lives Matter

symbol was in place long before the events of Jan. 6.

“I would say that (the U.S. Capitol riot) probably emboldened whoever did it, but again, there were hundreds of terrible remarks on social media,” Carmichael said.

The defaced vinyl on the billboard has been taken down and will be replaced in the coming weeks, Carmichael said, as soon as replacement vinyl can be produced and arrives in La Grande.

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