

COVID-19

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roughly 1.67% — nearly 17 times higher than the average death rate of the flu during the past three years.

The national death rate is closely mirrored in Union County, where 1,114 cases of COVID-19 had resulted in 16 deaths as of Monday, Jan. 18, according to the Center for Human Development. That puts the local death rate at just over 1.4%. At that rate, more than one in 70 Union County residents who tested positive for COVID-19 died as a result.

While COVID-19 may feel like the flu to some individuals who contract it, the effects of the illnesses are dangerously different. As of Tuesday, Jan. 19, COVID-19 had killed 18,755 Americans in just the preceding seven days, according to the CDC.

'It doesn't affect younger, healthy people'

The overwhelming majority of deaths from COVID-19 occur in elderly populations, for whom the disease is particularly deadly. According to the Oregon Health Authority,



Kaleb Lay/The Observer

A sign in a window overlooking Adams Avenue in downtown La Grande on Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, calls for an end to COVID-19 "lockdowns." Public health restrictions aimed at staunching the spread of the disease have forced some businesses to shut their doors and limited social gatherings for months in Union County.

roughly one in five people older than 80 who contracted COVID-19 in Oregon died as a result, and deaths of those 60 or older accounted for 1,642 of Oregon's 1,808 deaths, or 90.8%, as of Tuesday, Jan. 19.

This has led to an apparent misconception that COVID-19 affects only the elderly and therefore younger and healthier populations do not need to take the virus as seriously.

However, the same populations that account for

the majority of COVID-19 deaths account for a minor share of the cases. Based on tracking data from the OHA, as of Jan. 19, those age 60 or older had tallied only 17.3% of Oregon's positive COVID-19 cases, while those ages 10 to 39 had tallied 49.3%.

While it may be true that younger people are less likely to die from COVID-19, the data show that younger populations are driving the spread of the disease, while older populations are bearing the brunt of that spread.

'Masks don't work'

There are many variations on this misconception, including sentiments that only "sealed" or high-quality masks can prevent the spread of COVID-19. Many seem to stem from the fact that the COVID-19 particle is extremely small and can pass through cloth masks or that gaps between a mask and a person's face can allow for the passage of air.

Dr. Stephen Hunsaker, a hospitalist with Grande Ronde Hospital who grew up in Baker City, explained the function of masks in a recent interview on EOALive TV:

"The mask doesn't catch

coronavirus," Hunsaker explained, "but it does catch those little tiny water droplets you exhale, and those water droplets have the majority of the virus that you're exhaling. So, in that way, the mask actually does help. It's not a hundred percent, but it's certainly better than not having anything."

Additionally, study after study from numerous institutions — the University of California San Francisco, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Lancet medical journal and the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences — have indicated consistent mask-wearing drives down COVID-19 transmission rates. And the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation modeled a best-case scenario for the future of the pandemic in which universal mask-wearing smothers the spread of the disease.

Masks have been repeatedly proven effective in curtailing the spread of COVID-19.

'The vaccine is dangerous/untested'

Misinformation around the two COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use in the U.S. has exploded since they were rolled out in

December. Some common misconceptions about vaccines claim that they are untested or even dangerous.

The vaccines underwent extensive testing before the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized them for emergency use. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was tested on 44,000 people of varying age and ethnicity, and the Moderna vaccine was tested on 30,400 people, many of whom reportedly worked in occupations that put them at high risk of infection, according to FDA memorandums on the review of the vaccines.

Through testing on those tens of thousands of people, both vaccines were shown to prevent serious symptoms of COVID-19. Common side effects of the vaccine included pain at the injection site, muscle and joint pain and chills.

Both vaccines were found to be both safe and effective.

While some people have had allergic reactions to the vaccines, including one person at Wallowa Memorial Hospital in Enterprise who has since recovered, recipients are monitored after injection for signs of anaphylaxis, and reactions have proved to be exceedingly rare.

PRESIDENT

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pandemic.

"The will of the people has been heard, and the will of the people has been heeded. We've learned again that democracy is precious and democracy is fragile. At this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed," Biden said. "This is America's day. This is democracy's day. A day in history and hope, of renewal and resolve."

And then he pivoted to challenges ahead, acknowledging the surging virus that has claimed more than 400,000 lives in the United States. Biden looked out over a capital city dotted with empty storefronts that attest to the pandemic's deep economic toll and where summer protests laid bare the nation's renewed reckoning on racial injustice.

"We have much to do in this winter of peril, and significant possibilities: much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build and much to gain," Biden said. "Few people in our nation's history have more challenged, or found a time more challenging or difficult than the time we're in now."

His predecessor's absence underscored the healing that is needed.

Flouting tradition, Donald Trump departed Washington ahead of the inauguration rather than accompany his successor to the Capitol. Though three other former presidents — Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — gathered to watch the ceremonial transfer of power, Trump, awaiting his second impeachment trial, instead flew to Florida after stoking grievance among his supporters with the lie that Biden's win was illegitimate.

Biden, in his third run for the presidency, staked his candidacy less on any distinctive political ideology than on galvanizing a broad coalition of voters around the notion that Trump posed an existential threat to American democracy. Biden did not mention Trump by name in the early moments of his inaugural address but alluded to the rifts his predecessor had left create.

"I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also



Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Vice President Kamala Harris bumps fists with President-elect Joe Biden after she was sworn in during the inauguration, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

know they are not new. Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we all are created equal and the harsh, ugly reality of racism, nativism, fear, demonization that have long torn us apart," Biden said. "This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward and we must meet this moment as the United States of America."

Biden came to office with a well of empathy and resolve born by personal tragedy as well as a depth of experience forged from more than four decades in Washington. At age 78, he was the oldest president inaugurated.

More history was made at his side, as Kamala Harris became the first woman to be vice president. The former U.S. senator from California is also the first Black person and the first person of South Asian descent elected to the vice presidency and will become the highest-ranking woman ever to serve in government.

The two were sworn in during an inauguration ceremony with few paral-

lels in history.

Tens of thousands of troops are on the streets to provide security precisely two weeks after a violent mob of Trump supporters, incited by the Republican president, stormed the Capitol in an attempt to prevent the certification of Biden's victory.

"Here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people," Biden said. "To stop the work of our democracy. To drive us from this sacred ground. It did not happen. It will never happen. Not today, not tomorrow. Not ever. Not ever."

The tense atmosphere evoked the 1861 inauguration of Lincoln, who was secretly transported to Washington to avoid assassins on the eve of the Civil War, or Roosevelt's inaugural in 1945, when he opted for a small, secure ceremony at the White House in the waning months of World War II.

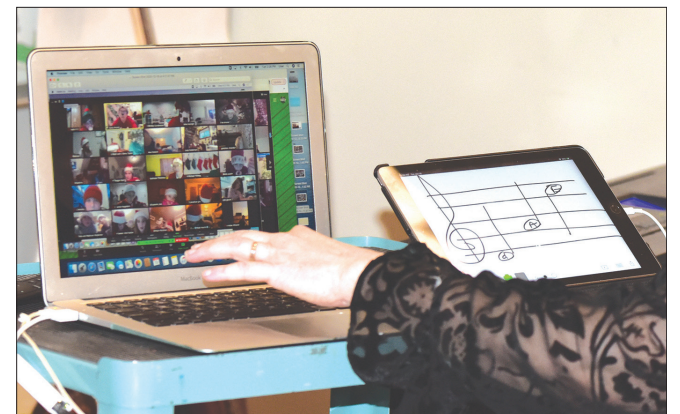
The day began with a reach across the aisle after four years of bitter partisan battles under Trump. At Biden's invitation, congressional leaders from both

parties bowed their heads in prayer in the socially distanced service just a few blocks from the White House.

Once at the Capitol, Biden will be administered the oath by Chief Justice John Roberts; Harris will be sworn in by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court. Vice President Mike Pence, standing in for Trump, was sitting nearby as Lady Gaga, holding a gold microphone, sang the National Anthem accompanied by the U.S. Marine Corps band.

The theme of Biden's approximately 30-minute speech will be "America United," and aides said it would be a call to set aside differences during a moment of national trial.

Biden will then oversee a "Pass in Review," a military tradition that honors the peaceful transfer of power to a new commander in chief. Then, Biden, Harris and their spouses will be joined by that bipartisan trio of former presidents to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.



Dick Mason/The Observer

The La Grande Fiddle Club relies on the virtual meeting platform Zoom due to the COVID-19 restrictions on in-person gatherings. During the pandemic, the club has grown from 30 members meeting once a week to 47 members meeting every school day afternoon.

MUSIC

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the breakout rooms are a great teaching tool. Arnold always assigns one student in a breakout room to be its leader.

"Kids like to be selected to be leaders," she said. "It gives them a feeling of importance."

A drawback to teaching music virtually is students, who are in their homes, don't play instruments together. This means they aren't able to hear the whole group at once, making it difficult to learn to carry their own part while hearing multiple parts, Arnold said.

Another shortcoming is students have to learn to tune their instruments themselves and are responsible for fixing broken strings and the like, which means they usually have to go to a local music store for repairs that otherwise could have been done in an in-person class.

Arnold enjoys teaching online, but said that she will always prefer providing in-person instruction. She said it makes it much easier to quickly respond to student needs.

"You can provide instant

feedback," Arnold said.

The educator noted, though, the move to make the string club virtual is proving so successful that an online school district Ukulele Club was recently added, which meets once a week and has 15 members. It is run with the help of Kate Dunlap, a Greenwood elementary music teacher, Jennifer Slippy, a Central counselor, and Sheldeen Yiftheq, a Central parent.

Arnold said the positive reception the district's strings club has received after going online will influence how it operates once the pandemic is over, with the club likely to provide both in-person and online instruction.

"It will be a hybrid," she said.

Of the club's 47 members, 44 are in the La Grande School District and three are in the Imbler School District. The students are in grades three to five. Fiddle Club members make up the bulk of the Student Symphony. Arnold hopes that by keeping the virtual element in the future the club can be expanded to include students from other Union County school districts and those in Baker County.

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