

SPORTS

Continued from Page 1A

staff safe from infection is paramount, but noted even online competitions and events for clubs such as FFA and FBLA didn’t provide students with the benefits of in-person activities.

“A lot of (the students) join these clubs for the opportunity to have exposure to different things, so this exposure’s not quite what that opportunity was,” Greif said. “I guess it’s better than none, but the interaction with kids from other schools and other areas of the state has been a positive thing for our kids, so without that it’s rather frustrating.”

Greif said Elgin students already are participating in conditioning programs to prepare for whatever season might be approved, though that conditioning was not sport-specific.

“We haven’t been told by OSAA what we can participate in, so we’re



Kaleb Lay/The Observer

The bleachers overlooking the football field and track that Union High School uses sit empty on the afternoon of Thursday, Jan. 21, 2021. Local schools are hoping the Oregon School Activities Association will approve football and volleyball seasons in the coming months and are pushing a proposal to proceed with an amended basketball season.

just doing some conditioning,” Greif said.

North Powder School District recently posted a survey to its Facebook page encouraging members of that community to submit their opinions regarding a return to competition.

“We were trying to gather data on how many of our community members, whether they had kids, don’t have kids, et cetera, support us being

able to play sports,” Dixon said.

School officials said they also hope to have seasons for football and volleyball in the near future, but were waiting on a decision from the state.

COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

University — which had announced it expected to be listed as a facility with an outbreak due to mass testing of returning students — was not in the report.

Only one workplace outbreak grew from the previous week. Outdoor RV’s outbreak nearly doubled in size from 12 cases as of Jan. 13 to 23 cases on Jan. 21, according to the OHA’s report.

Outdoor RV did not respond to a request for comment on their outbreak by press time.

Vaccination also picked up speed this week, both locally and across the state. The Oregon Health Authority reported it now is consistently meeting the state’s goal of at least 12,000 vaccinations per day, and more than a quarter million doses found their way into people’s arms, and a total of 479,325 doses had been delivered across the state as of Jan. 21.

In Union County, vaccinations nearly reached the 1,000 mark by Thursday, when the Oregon Health Authority reported a total of 977 county residents received one dose of vaccine, while eight had received both doses. Roughly 3.67% of county residents received at least one dose as of Jan. 21, according to OHA tracking data.

The Center for Human Development also is offering interested parties the option to receive vaccination and COVID-19 updates via email. To sign up, visit [chdinc.org/subscribe](http://chdinc.org/subscribe).

Brown defends giving vaccine priority to teachers

By GARY A. WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown said Friday, Jan. 22, she will stick with her controversial plan to vaccinate school staff ahead of elderly residents.

“My priorities have not changed,” Brown said during a press conference.

The state vaccination priority list calls for an estimated 100,000 K-12 teachers, school staff, child care workers and preschool employees to be eligible for vaccination Jan. 25.

Residents 80 and over will be eligible two weeks later, on Feb. 8. The minimum age will drop five years each week until those 65 and over are eligible on March 1.

Eligibility does not ensure availability. Brown has set a goal of the state’s program administering 12,000 shots per day. With current vaccines requiring two shots several weeks apart, the goal means 6,000 residents would be fully vaccinated each day in the near future.

Oregon is one of only five states in the nation where the inoculation of those 65 and over has not begun. As of Friday, it is the only state to prioritize educators and staff ahead of older residents.

Oregon has an estimated 767,500 residents who are aged 65 or over out of a total population of about 4.2 million. The state ranks 11th in percentage of elderly residents at just over 18%.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state’s top infectious disease expert, said the



Abigail Dollins/Statesman-Journal via AP, Pool, File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Jan. 13, 2021, visits the Marion County and Salem Health COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Salem. On Friday, Jan. 22, 2021, the Democrat confirmed she would stick with her plan to vaccinate school staff ahead of elderly residents.

Oregon Health Authority had not made estimates of the number of people who could die because the starting date for older Oregonians’ eligibility was moved back two weeks.

OHA reported Thursday that COVID-19 related deaths “surged” to 195 the previous week, the highest weekly toll to date. It broke the record set the prior week. According to OHA statistics, those aged 70 and over have accounted for 77% of the state’s COVID-19 deaths.

Extrapolating those numbers, 390 Oregonians would die over a two-week period based on current rates and 300 would be over 70. OHA has not responded to a request for comment on the estimate.

Brown and health officials were able to point to some good news during the press conference. OHA reported 849 new COVID-19

cases and 11 new fatalities on Thursday. The report showed a continued gradual decline in cases and hospitalizations at a time when the state had previously forecast both would rise this month. A feared “Christmas spike” in cases due to residents traveling and gathering for the holidays has been shallower than expected.

Thursday marked the fifth day in a row with fewer than 850 cases. The current positive infection rate is 5.9% of tests, still above the 5% target set by the OHA to indicate infection rates are not growing rapidly.

The state also updated its vaccination numbers, saying 253,711 shots have been given since the vaccines began arriving in Oregon late last year.

When the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines became available, The Centers for Disease Control guidelines identified health care

workers who are likely to come into contact with COVID-19 patients at the top of the priority list.

The CDC also called for inoculations for nursing home residents and staff, a group that accounted for just 5% of infections, but 36% of the nation’s more than 400,000 deaths.

The facilities have accounted for 53% of deaths in Oregon, one of 13 states where more than half of COVID-19 fatalities are in residential nursing homes.

Most states have followed the CDC guidelines in deciding the ongoing priority groups. Older Americans, who are disproportionately more likely to suffer severe and fatal cases, were next on the CDC list. People with medical conditions that put them at risk of severe illness or death were also listed.

Brown and OHA decided to veer from the list, placing educators and school staff in front of the elderly. With schools mostly closed since March, Brown has consistently said the long-term damage to students’ quality of education, mental health and emotional well-being had been damaged by distance learning. She’s set Feb. 15 as a goal for most schools to reopen if they meet minimum COVID-19 health recommendations.

While noting on Friday that school-age children are not in danger of widespread severe illness or death, Brown said the damage was deep enough that it warranted what she

cast as a brief diversion of vaccine to jump-start education.

“It’s really pretty simple,” Brown said of her priorities. “I am using every single tool I have to get kids back into the classroom this school year.”

Several studies have shown that students are losing ground because of remote learning. Schools also ensure access to meals for some and safeguard against child abuse because someone is seeing the student regularly outside of their home.

But Brown could not quantify the impact of reopening schools next month compared to May or later.

Courtney Campbell, a medical ethicist at Oregon State University, told Oregon Public Broadcasting that Brown deserves credit for making sure that COVID-19 resources reach underserved communities and those that have been disproportionately harmed by the pandemic. Black and Hispanic residents have a higher risk of infection due to having less access to quality health care, being in crowded housing conditions more frequently, and a higher incidence of having jobs that cannot be done remotely.

But Campbell said the decision to bump up school employees on the list of those most in need of vaccination was questionable at best.

“Health equity does not support prioritizing teachers and K-12 staff,” she said.

SESSION

Continued from Page 1A

Oregon could get a sixth congressional district. The final numbers on which redistricting decisions will be based won’t be released until April 1.

If the Legislature cannot agree on the new district lines, the mapping of state legislative districts goes to Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, while congressional lines go to a federal panel. There are often court challenges. But the new boundaries will be in place for the 2022 elections.

**COVID-19 vs. open Capitol**

State political reporters recently held an online meeting with legislative leaders and Gov. Kate Brown to get a preview of politics and policy agendas for 2021.

The Capitol has been closed to the public since Gov. Kate Brown declared a state of emergency in March as COVID-19 began

its spread through Oregon. The Legislature has held three short special sessions to deal with emergency measures tied to the pandemic, wildfires and police reform.

Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Stayton, said the regular session of the Legislature should not continue with the public only able to take part via online testimony.

“You do what you can to make it so that the public has a right to come in and testify,” Girod said. “There are billions of dollars that are going to be spent.”

Girod, 70, said he knew that with its many older members and those with health issues, the Legislature included people who were in high-risk categories for serious illness and even death.

But he argued a year of Oregonians being limited to virtual involvement was not acceptable in a transparent democracy. Opening the Capitol in some form was “worth the risk.”

Courtney disagreed. “I am not willing to play

God with this stuff,” said Courtney, 77.

Nationwide, over 150 state lawmakers have become infected with COVID-19, according to the Ballotpedia political website, and seven have died.

Oregon’s five short days of special sessions since March had avoided any infections. But the regular session would require many more gatherings in Salem. Reopening the Capitol would increase the viral exposure on each person inside.

“You may be willing to take the risk, but I am not,” Courtney said.

**Increased Capitol security**

Violent assaults on the Oregon Capitol on Dec. 21 and the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 are driving an aggressive review of security in Salem.

Oregon is one of 20 states that does not require visitors to pass through metal detectors to enter the state Capitol. It’s one of 45 states that allow some form of open carry of firearms,

including AR-15 semi-automatic rifles and other “long guns.” It’s even one of about 20 states that allow the guns to be carried into the Capitol.

Senate Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, said most protestors would say they carry the guns as an expression of their 2nd Amendment right to bear arms.

An incredulous House Majority Leader Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, vigorously disagreed. The recent attacks show the presence of armed protestors has a different motivation: “It’s to intimidate,” she said.

All aspects of secu-

**La GRANDE AUTO REPAIR**  
975-2000  
[www.lagrandeautorepair.com](http://www.lagrandeautorepair.com)

**Joe Horst**

**MOST ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE**  
**ACDelcoTSS**

rity are under review, but any changes would be announced in public in advance and any change to gun laws would likely require legislation.

Courtney lives in Salem, represents a Salem district and has worked in the Capitol since he was first elected to the Legislature in 1981.

Surveying the reality today — the Capitol shuttered for 10 months, the attack on the Legislature,

concrete blocks placed in front of the entrance, lower outside windows shielded against future riots by plywood, yards of fencing and National Guard troops on the grounds — makes Courtney immensely sad.

“This is really a traumatic thing to have Oregon, which is the most open Capitol in the nation, about to become a fortress,” Courtney said. “I never thought I’d see that, it breaks my heart.”

**FAMILY OWNED**



**NORTHWEST FURNITURE & MATTRESS**

**215 Elm Street La Grande (541) 963-5440**

 [northwestfurnitureandmattress.com](http://northwestfurnitureandmattress.com) 