

An Opinion: To Vaccinate, or Not to Vaccinate, That is the Question

By Scott Laird

Oregonians appear to be struggling with a question – should they or shouldn't they get vaccinated against COVID?

Statistics released during the week of May 17 show that over 2 million Oregonians over the age of 16 had received their first vaccination shot, which is just over 59% of the population, while 46% are now fully vaccinated. On May 18 Oregon announced five counties, Benton, Deschutes, Hood River, Lincoln and Washington, had reached the 65% level (with the first shot), allowing them to move to the state's lower risk category on Friday, May 21.

Meanwhile, Columbia County, like some other rural counties across the state, is lagging behind the overall state numbers, with just 33% of adults fully vaccinated and 44% with the first shot. Clinics around the state are reporting a slowdown in demand for vaccination appointments. But in far Eastern Oregon Wallowa County has vaccinated over 46% of their residents, at the coast Tillamook has reached 47%, and Clatsop County is at 46%.

Depending on the county, between 32% and 67% of adults (16+ years old) are vaccinated with their first shot, an extremely wide range.

Case counts across the state are slowly declining following the Spring Break Spike, that saw daily case numbers that had been in the 200s statewide explode to close to 1,000 for several weeks, but are still hovering in the 700/day range. That spike has been linked to the rapid increase in cases of the more contagious B.1.1.7 variant, which is now the dominant strain in Oregon cases; health officials remain unclear whether this variant leads to increased risk of hospitalization and death.

Are there ramifications to not having a county population get vaccinated? There are. A few weeks ago Columbia County, along with 12 other counties were moved back into the "extreme danger" category, forcing local restaurants and bars to close their doors to indoor seating. The county was quickly moved back the following week by just barely meeting the minimum standards. But with the uncertainty around the quickly spreading COVID variants, who knows what's around the corner.

On May 11, Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced if 70% of Oregonians have received their first vaccine shot by July 4th, most COVID restrictions will be lifted. But we're a long way from that goal. And then after the CDC announced it was safe for people who were fully vaccinated to stop wearing masks both indoors and out, Oregon had to clarify that statement on May 18 because of fears that stores and other public spaces will be filled with individuals pretending to be vaccinated and putting others at risk; under the new policy, vaccinated individuals can only remove their masks in places that are asking for proof of vaccination.

If COVID continues to hang around, will our essential workers be forced to continue to wear masks, even if they are fully vaccinated, if their em-

ployers decline to verify vaccine status of those who enter their facilities? Will your summer plans be compromised? What will school be like for our students in the fall? Will we see another spike and a return to restrictions when the weather turns cooler and people head back indoors?

In a peek at what the future may hold, the University of Oregon and Portland State University announced they will require all students attending classes on campus, and all staff, to be fully vaccinated prior to the start of fall classes.

To date there have been over 193,000 reported cases of COVID in Oregon, and 2,567 deaths attributed to the virus. Columbia County has reported 1,735 cases and 26 deaths. Across the U.S. over 32 million cases have been reported, with 583,000 deaths.

Maybe you choose not to believe the statistics being reported. Maybe you have health risks that could be complicated by the COVID vaccine. Maybe you don't trust the process that was used to approve the currently available vaccinations.

Vernonians pride themselves on the way they respond to emergencies and come together to help out their neighbors – one only need look at the 1996 and 2007 floods, or any time one of our neighbors suffers a house fire. Yet this public health crisis has become politicized and divided our communities. Which forces us to consider, why is this so different from other emergencies when we've all pitched in and worked together?

Getting the vaccination is a personal choice, but it's a choice that impacts not just you and your family. It just might impact local businesses, the ability to receive an education, your recreation opportunities, and maybe someone else's life. Just remember the longer this virus hangs around, the more opportunity it has to mutate and the harder it will be to make it, and the restrictions around it, go away for good.

"To be, or not to be, that is the question," stated Prince Hamlet, in his famous speech in Shakespeare's play. You've probably heard those words but may not have thought much about their meaning. This might be a good time to consider it. The speech is essentially all about life and death. Hamlet is asking whether he wants to live or not to live, considering how painful and miserable human life is, and how death could be preferable – were it not for the fear and uncertainty of what comes after death.

To vaccinate, or not to vaccinate, that is the question right now. What happens this summer and fall, may depend on your answer.

What is the Mist Elementary Experience? *continued from front page*

focused learning has remained constant. And we have a ton of fun: sitting outside and sketching the woods and its seasonal changes, tending the garden, playing one of the endlessly creative P.E. games in the old gym, choosing to finish our work outside in the warm sunshine.

Some children specifically need a calmer, more focused learning environment to thrive. I have had the pleasure of watching students transfer to Mist and show discipline and joy in school work that I hadn't seen before. I realize some of you already know what I am talking about – your children have attended or you went there yourself.

Both of our local elementary schools have their strengths. I love working with Vernonia's staff and teachers, seeing the Commons packed with students listening to our school band and choir, and hearing the cheerful din of a playground full of children. Yet I particularly treasure being part of the Mist Elementary community. Eating my lunch and chatting with volunteers as they warm up kids' soup or leftovers from home in the microwave as older sisters gently tease their younger brothers across the table. Seeing friendships tighten year-to-year as kids grow up together. Seeing a community realize the elusive dream of a thriving rural school.



Publisher and Managing Editor
Scott Laird
503-367-0098
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Contributors
Chip Bubl
Tobie Finzel
Superintendent Aaron Miller
Brittanie Roberts
Brady Romtvedt

Photography
Scott Laird

Vernonia's Voice is published on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month.

One year subscription (24 issues) \$35

Want to advertise?
Have an article?
Contact: scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Vernonia's Voice, LLC (503) 367-0098
PO Box 55, Vernonia, OR 97064

Yes, I support *Vernonia's Voice* with this one time contribution.

☐ \$12 ☐ \$75
☐ \$24 ☐ \$100
☐ \$50 ☐ Other \$_____

Receive the *Voice* in your mailbox twice each month. Subscription cost covers first class postage for one year.

☐ \$35

Thank you for your support
Mail check or money order to:
Vernonia's Voice
PO Box 55, Vernonia, OR 97064
or PayPal:
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

AA Meetings

Open Meetings
Mondays & Thursdays 6:30-7:30 pm
Vernonia Christian Church
410 North Street

Or find a meeting at:
<https://www.oregonaadistrict18.org/>