

COVID restrictions loosen throughout county, state

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI
Of the Keizertimes

State health officials announced in a press release Monday, Feb. 7 that mask requirements for indoor public places and schools would be removed no later than March 31, with the possibility of the requirement being lifted sooner.

“We should see COVID-19 hospitalizations drop by the end of March because so many Oregonians are wearing masks and taking other steps to protect themselves and each other, such as getting a booster shot or vaccinating

their children. At that point, it will be safer to lift mask requirements,” said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, state epidemiologist, in a statement.

According to the Feb. 7 press release from the Oregon Health Authority, health scientists expect 400 or fewer Oregonians will be hospitalized with COVID by the end of March — the number of hospitalizations in the state prior to the Omicron variant.

If Oregon reaches 400 or fewer hospitalizations prior to March 31, state health officials said they would consider lifting the indoor requirement sooner.

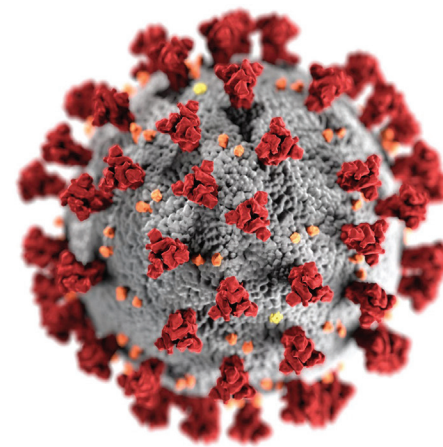
system strains to treat high numbers of severely ill patients,” the release said.

With the state’s temporary indoor mask mandate set to expire on Feb. 8, health officials filed a permanent new rule with the Oregon Secretary of State to require that masks be worn while indoors in public places. Health officials said the permanent rule was “the only way health officials could extend the current temporary mask rule past its expiration date and until mask rules would no longer be needed.”

While daily COVID cases have continued to decrease across Oregon, as of Feb. 8, there were still 1,055 Oregonians hospitalized due to COVID. The release said that current models show hospitalizations peaking at 1,169 before declining throughout February and March.

The Marion County Health and Human Services also announced Tuesday, Feb. 8 that they would stop doing COVID case investigations. Going forward, this means individuals that test positive for COVID should no longer expect a call or letter in the mail.

In the press release, the county Health and Human Services said they will no longer provide return to work letters or work restriction letters for an employee who has tested positive for COVID-19. The department said individuals should work with health providers and their employer to come up



with a return-to-work date.

“If you have symptoms, even if you are vaccinated and especially if you can’t get a test, you should stay home and isolate to prevent potentially spreading it to others,” the release said. “You can also help by doing your own contact tracing. Contact the people you were in close contact with beginning two days before your symptoms began. Call, email, or text close contacts as soon as possible.”

The department reiterated that the best way to prevent getting COVID is by getting vaccinated. People can visit <https://www.co.marion.or.us/HLT/COVID-19/Pages/Default.aspx> to find vaccination locations near them.

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— DR. DEAN SIDELINGER
State Epidemiologist

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