

MASK,

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Both Marion and Polk counties are recording medium spread of COVID, according to CDC data, as is the Portland Metro area. Counties further south along the I-5 corridor, including Linn, Benton and Lane, are still seeing high spread of COVID, as is much of southern and southeastern Oregon.

In Oregon, the mandate will lift for most indoor public places, including schools, at 11:59 p.m. March 11. Masks will remain required in some settings because of other state or federal rules.

Those include hospitals and health care facilities, including long-term care and skilled nursing facilities, said state epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger in a Monday news conference.

"This is where some of the most vulnerable members of our Oregon community seek care. It's also where people with COVID-19 often go to seek care," Sidelinger said. "We want to ensure that the workforce, as well as the visitors and patients in those settings have the highest level of protection. We'd like to see cases come down more before we lift the requirement for masks in these settings."

Federal rules set to expire March 18 currently require masks be worn on public transit, including city buses, as well as on airplanes and in airports.

The announcement comes as new COVID infections and related hospitalizations have been falling rapidly from a late January peak during the omicron surge.

As of Feb. 25, there were 527 Oregonians hospitalized with COVID, according to Oregon Health Authority data. That's down from 741 one week prior, and an Omicron peak of 1,130 on Jan. 27.

In region 2, the hospital area including

Marion, Polk, Linn, Benton, Lincoln and Yamhill counties, there were 136 people hospitalized with COVID on Feb. 25, down from 151 a week before, and a peak of 205 on Jan. 28.

State health officials previously said they aimed to lift the mask mandate by the end of March, or once the state had fewer than 400 people hospitalized with COVID.

With the lifting of a statewide mask mandate for schools, local school boards and district leaders may still choose to impose mandates locally.

Christy Perry, superintendent of the Salem-Keizer School District, said last week district leaders and the school board would consult with local health authorities and develop a plan before the district's spring break, which begins March 21.

The faster timeline Brown announced Monday means district leaders will have to make a decision sooner. The school board is next scheduled to meet March 8. Perry said Monday morning she was in meetings reviewing federal masking guidelines.

Colt Gill, who leads the state Department of Education, said in a Monday news conference that his agency would release updated guidelines Wednesday for quarantining students exposed to COVID and other safety protocols in light of changing federal guidelines and the mask mandate lifting.

Gill said his agency moved up the timeline to drop school mask requirements with the rest of the state because school leaders in Oregon have previously said it's challenging when K-12 schools have different rules than the rest of the state.

He said he expects some districts may elect to temporarily continue requiring masks as they sort out policies and agreements with employee unions.

"Many (school districts), we may see continue with masks locally for that week before spring break before they begin to implement changes," Gill said.

Chemeketa to offer free introductory criminal justice course

Chemeketa Community College will offer a special one-day class for local high school students with an interest in criminal justice.

Criminal Justice: Aspiration, Exploration, and Preparation is a brand new, one-day, non-credit, no cost exploratory class slated for May 21, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The course is for high school students, but it's open to anyone who wants to learn more about law enforcement. Professionals, instructors, and current students will lead the class.

Coursework will cover the field of corrections: Corrections-Related Experience (CORE), which covers the prison and jail systems; and Parole and Probation in both juvenile and adult settings and Law Enforcement-Related Experience (LERE), which covers the law enforcement arm.

The group will break into the two groups (CORE and LERE) after the introductory portion. Demonstrations will take place

for a hands-on experience. The course will also briefly cover the FBI's role, however additional experience and higher education are required to become a federal officer. Instructors will also guide students to financial aid, help fill out applications, and cover general enrollment information.

"The Chemeketa Criminal Justice Department is excited to offer a completely free course to prospective or continuing students to Aspire, Explore, and Prepare for a career in criminal justice," said Michael Withington, Chemeketa Law Enforcement Instructor. "This brand new course offering is designed to help you navigate to the right criminal justice career for you, through presentations by professionals, hands-on opportunities with current students, and direct guidance to get you started towards your future."

For more information, contact Withington at michael.withington@chemeketa.edu or (503) 589-7768.

Celebration of Flowers show

The Keizer Art Association has scheduled its annual juried Celebration of Flowers Show that opens on Tuesday, April 26 and runs through the end of May.

The association is calling for artists to submit art in a number of categories: 2D, 3D, photography, digital and youth (by children 4 to 14 years of age).

Artists can download the shows' prospectus at keizerarts.com.

Gervais school plans BBQ dinner

St. Louis Parish's Sacred Heart School will hold a drive-through BBQ chicken dinner on Sunday, March 13, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The dinner will include 1/2 barbecued chicken, baked potato, coleslaw, dinner roll and dessert. Cost per dinner is \$13. An all carte dinner of 1/2 barbecued chicken and a quart of coleslaw is \$5.


Sacred Heart School Hall is located at 515 7th Street in Gervais

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