

Masks: Public opinion has been split over requirement

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like grocery stores, retail shops and restaurants and bars when not eating or drinking.

Brown did not include counties with lower infection rates, but gave counties the ability to opt in to the requirement.

Oregon is one of several states to see a surge in virus cases since travel, social gathering and other government restrictions began to loosen. Washington state required people to wear masks in public as of Friday.

Public health experts believe people can help reduce the spread of the virus by wearing masks.

Astoria and Cannon Beach unanimously passed motions this week asking the county to opt in to the mask requirement. Seaside Mayor Jay Barber and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown also expressed their support to the county.

“I think what we have learned over time is that having individual cities and counties do local emergency orders that are specific can create a lot of confusion,” County Manager Don Bohn said. “And so part of what we have learned with our cities is if we go together, it is a lot easier for us to be communicating to the public and it’s a lot easier for us to be communicating with



Volunteers put KN95 masks in bags with information on how to properly wear them.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

the businesses.”

Bohn said public opinion has been split.

“Fifty percent saying ‘no,’ they would rather not have a requirement, (that) it should be a choice. And they don’t really feel comfortable having government tell them to wear a mask,” he said. “And the other 50%, who basically just say a lot of people have been wearing them voluntarily, but there are others who are

PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS BELIEVE PEOPLE CAN HELP REDUCE THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS BY WEARING MASKS.

not. And they just feel to control the virus, wearing a mask would be prudent. And so they’re just asking for messaging that it is required.”

People with medi-

cal conditions or disabilities that prevent them from wearing face coverings are exempt from the mask requirement, along with children under 12 years old and people who are exercis-

ing at gyms.

Matt Stanley, the general manager of the Astoria Co-op, which already requires customers to wear masks, urged the county to require masks and take the onus off businesses.

“I think the majority of people who live here and in the country want this to be mandated,” he said. “Unfortunately, there is a very vocal minority that makes it seem like there’s more peo-

ple who don’t want it. That really isn’t the case.

“People want to be able to get back to as much of a normal life as possible and masks — the facts and the evidence are increasingly showing — allow us to do that with relative safety. But you have to have a critical mass of people wearing them or it doesn’t work.”

Stanley said the co-op has had pretty good compliance, but that a county requirement would help. He said the county will have to advertise clearly and figure out a way to enforce the mandate, particularly at some larger businesses.

There has been a significant local push for masks over the past few weeks.

More than 500 people signed a petition started last Saturday by Sarah Jane Bardy, the owner of Eleventh Street Barber in Astoria, asking the county and Astoria to require masks.

“The trouble is, the majority of these folks — many of them tourists, are not wearing masks,” Bardy wrote.

“When parts of the state are still closed, restricted, and requiring masks be worn, it’s no wonder people are flocking here. Though their tourist dollars come at a crucial time for small businesses, it is putting our community at risk for an outbreak that our hospitals simply cannot handle.”

Health director: McNickle said he has had little contact with others

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since he said he has had little contact with others.

He said he took a polymerase chain reaction test a couple of weeks ago, which came back negative. He said he has been out of the office preparing for a surgery when he was given a rapid

test before the operation and tested positive.

McNickle said because the rapid tests have a higher false positive rate, he plans on taking another polymerase chain reaction test on Friday to determine whether the rapid test result is accurate.

“When all this started,

I’ve been able to avoid getting it — even though all of our staff and others have been exposed to COVID all the way till June — from doing protective measures like washing hands, wearing masks, getting away from large gatherings,” he said. “So I’ve been following my own guidance and it

worked pretty well up until Monday.”

The county announced on Thursday that an employee at the Public Health Department had tested positive for the virus but did not publicly identify McNickle. The director confirmed the diagnosis after being contacted by The Astorian.

Because of precautions taken by the Public Health Department, the county expects to have limited any exposure and is confident no patients have been placed at risk.

The public health clinic will be closed until next week for deep cleaning.

“In an abundance of cau-

tion, the department canceled all patient appointments, shut its offices down for a deep cleaning and tested employees on Wednesday ... The department has been in close contact with the state epidemiologist’s office at the Oregon Health Authority to determine next steps,” the county said in a statement.





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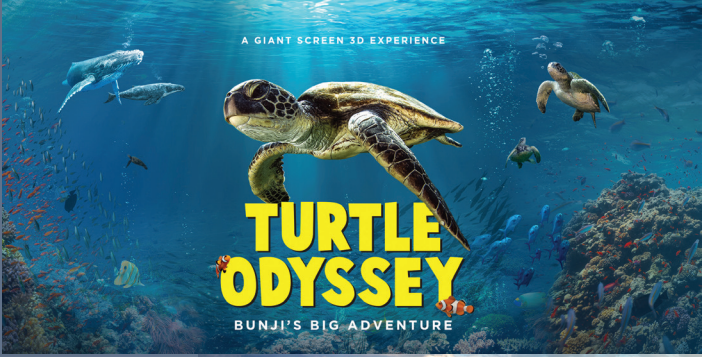
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