

Oregon fares better than other states on virus

By **AIMEE GREEN**
The Oregonian

Six months ago on Friday, the governor announced reality had finally hit Oregon: After months of the epidemic raging in China, the first person in the state had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Since then, Oregon public health officials have reported more than 25,000 known cases and more than 400 coronavirus deaths, marking a grim and ongoing chapter in the state’s history.

But Oregon has fared far better than many others — ranking 45th in the number of overall infections per capita and 43rd in the number of deaths per capita since the pandemic began.

Why? Public health experts credit a mixture of geography, demographics, public health orders, the willingness of a substantial number of Oregonians to abide by them and even a bit of luck. The state was the seventh in the nation on Feb. 28 to announce its first case of COVID-19, and that might have helped shift Oregon into high gear earlier than many others.

“Overall, we have done really well,” Dr. Renee Edwards, chief medical officer at Oregon Health & Science University, said. “An important piece is we had some time to prepare and in large measure we’ve treated this like a public health emergency.”

To be sure, Oregon is not Texas, Florida or Arizona — three of the states hit especially hard by the disease. Oregon also doesn’t have the international connections and population density of New York or New Jersey, where the virus flew in with travelers from Europe early in the pandemic and spread rampantly among the crowds, killing close to 50,000 in that region so far.

Conversely, Oregon has a lot more in common with sparsely populated places like Montana and Wyoming than neighboring states, which have all been hit much harder by the coronavirus.

Washington state has seen 66% more per capita cases and two and a half times the rate of deaths than in Oregon.

Idaho has reported nearly triple the cases per capita and 60% more deaths per capita than in Oregon.

“Idaho is kind of on fire right now, from a case standpoint,” Patrick Allen, director of the Oregon Health Authority, said earlier this month.

But Oregon is performing well only relative to the rest of the United States, which overall has floundered in its response. The country accounts for about 25% of cases and 22% of deaths in the world, but only about 4% of the world’s population.

Oregon, for example, has seen more cases and deaths than the entire country of South Korea, which is 12 times more populous.

So it comes as no surprise the pandemic still holds a tight grip over Ore-



Hayley Cusick tests a person for the coronavirus at a Providence Health & Services drive-thru.

Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS CREDIT A MIXTURE OF GEOGRAPHY, DEMOGRAPHICS, PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS, THE WILLINGNESS OF A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF OREGONIANS TO ABIDE BY THEM AND EVEN A BIT OF LUCK.

gon as well as the rest of the nation — shuttering schools and businesses, forcing millions into unemployment or to work from home and altering nearly every other facet of daily life.

Roughly half of all fatalities have been linked to vulnerable Oregonians living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Oregon’s Latino population, too, has been hit hard and now accounts for nearly 40% of the state’s known cases.

Some analysts, however, suspect the state’s overall case numbers and deaths might not be as high as in other parts of the country because Oregon is mostly white. One nationwide analysis found Latinos and African Americans are three times more likely to become infected and twice as likely to die as whites — the likely result of jobs that don’t allow these groups to work from home, longstanding disparities in access to health care and living in more crowded or multigenerational households.

Experts caution there’s a long slog ahead — and there’s still much Oregon, let alone the country, can do to improve until there’s a widely accessible vaccine.

“This is really a fragile state of affairs,” said Carlos Crespo, director of Portland State University’s School of Community Health. “We can be the next Idaho, California or Washington.”

Early interventions
Oregon adopted several early interventions that appear to have helped slow the coronavirus, providing a leg up over other states.

Just over two weeks after Oregon identified its first coronavirus case, Gov. Kate Brown closed K-12 schools statewide March 16.

That placed Brown among the first wave of governors nationwide to shutter classrooms.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association later

found that states requiring every school to close saw a drop in new infections and deaths.

Later that month, Brown announced Oregon’s stay-home order — an aggressive move that made it more difficult for coronavirus to spread.

She took heat from local leaders, including Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, for not acting sooner. But Brown implemented her March 23 order earlier than most others.

Before that, only four states — including California — had ordered residents to stay home, except for essential needs, and certain businesses to shut down.

Brown’s order came on the same day Washington Gov. Jay Inslee handed down a similar mandate. Washington’s order failed to have as much impact, despite the fact that Inslee lifted it more than two weeks after Brown lifted hers.

Some experts suspect that’s because COVID-19 had been circulating in Washington far longer, with the first case in the U.S. detected there Jan. 21. Seattle’s many international connections to Asia likely meant the virus was able to widely seed itself in the region before the true extent of the public health crisis was identified.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the timing of public health interventions is crucial. Each day that passes without them can dramatically change the trajectory of the disease because the coronavirus spreads exponentially.

Oregon’s eastern neighbor, meanwhile, issued its

stay-home order two days after Brown, on March 25. Idaho Gov. Brad Little lifted that order May 1, two weeks before Brown.

Cases surged in both states a short while later. Brown issued a statewide mask order effective July 1. Little has shunned one — and he’s received praise for it.

Among Little’s supporters? Ammon Bundy, an

Idaho resident who is best known for helping lead the 2016 occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Eastern Oregon.

Research shows masks make a difference. Data models at the University of Washington determined this month that if 95% of Americans start wearing masks whenever they go out, they’d prevent 66,000 people from becoming ill and ultimately dying coast to coast by December.

In Idaho, 58% of Boise residents said they always wear masks when out in public, according to a nationwide analysis published by The New York Times from July.

In Portland, it was roughly 75% to 85%.

“Idaho — being a more

politically conservative state than Oregon — may have a much higher proportion of ‘pandemic deniers’ among its population,” speculated Chunhui Chi, director of the Center for Global Health at Oregon State University.

“If people don’t believe there is a pandemic,” he added, “they will not take up any preventive measures.”

Hindsight in 2020

For all of Oregon’s good fortune, however, the state might have missed several opportunities to tamp down spread further.

It’s become clear Oregon, like much of the country, reopened too early under tremendous economic pressure to do so, experts say.

The governor gave the green light May 15 for most counties to reopen barber shops, beauty salons, gyms, malls and restaurants and bars for in-person dining as part of her phase one reopening plan.

Within two weeks, new infections in the state began to surge, from 35 new known cases a day in May to about 350 a day by late July.

Several experts told The Oregonian that the state reopened even though it lacked, and still lacks, testing capacity to identify new infections; a robust contact tracing system to track down people who might have been exposed; and quarantine and isolation policies to ensure that people who’ve been exposed and infected by the virus don’t spread it to the general population.

The state also has fallen short in supplying a place for people who’ve been infected to stay so they don’t infect other members of their households, experts say.

“This is why we have an uncontrollable pandemic,” Chi said.

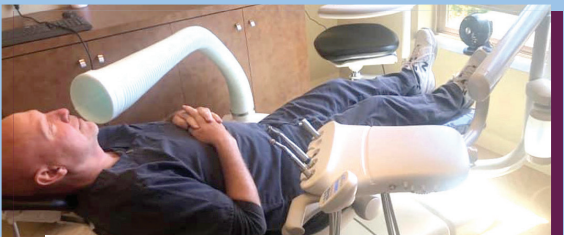
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Diane G.

I saw the highest standard of health safety practices in effect during my hygienist appointment today—much higher precautions than I’d seen in a local hospital when having tests last month. The new sanitation equipment and attention to patient safety at Klemp Family Dentistry is in keeping with a dental practice I consider cutting edge with respect to all my dental needs. It’s wonderful having a world class dental practice here at the coast, one where I can have procedures performed for which I used to have to travel to a specialist in Portland. I have been a patient of several local dentists in the past, but none had the skill and, more importantly, the attention to patient comfort that Dr. Klemp provides.

SEVEN-DAY FORECAST FOR ASTORIA

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
67 51	68 53	68 55	71 54	68 51	72 53	71 52
Breezy with sunshine	Partly sunny	Variable cloudiness	Partly sunny	Partial sunshine	Partly sunny	Sunny

ALMANAC

Astoria through Thursday

Temperatures

High/low 69/53

Normal high/low 69/52

Record high 91 in 2019

Record low 43 in 1955

Precipitation

Thursday 0.00"

Month to date 0.46"

Normal month to date 0.94"

Year to date 38.92"

Normal year to date 38.13"

Forecasts and graphics provided by
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UNDER THE SKY

Tonight’s Sky: Conjunction of the waxing gibbous moon and Jupiter.

Source: Jim Todd, OMSI

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today 6:33 a.m.

Sunset tonight 7:59 p.m.

Moonrise today 6:38 p.m.

Moonset today 2:29 a.m.

Full Last New First

Sep 1 Sep 10 Sep 17 Sep 23

TODAY’S TIDES

Astoria / Port Docks	Time	High (ft.)	Time	Low (ft.)
11:57 a.m.	6.3	5:39 a.m.	-0.5	
11:15 p.m.	7.7	5:25 p.m.	2.5	
Cape Disappointment				
11:52 a.m.	6.2	4:56 a.m.	-0.4	
10:57 p.m.	7.8	4:48 p.m.	3.0	
Hammond				
11:58 a.m.	6.4	5:09 a.m.	-0.7	
11:08 p.m.	7.9	5:06 p.m.	2.7	
Warrenton				
11:52 a.m.	6.7	5:23 a.m.	-0.4	
11:10 p.m.	8.1	5:09 p.m.	2.6	
Knappa				
12:34 p.m.	6.6	6:40 a.m.	-0.4	
11:52 p.m.	7.9	6:26 p.m.	2.2	
Depoe Bay				
11:09 a.m.	6.5	4:24 a.m.	-0.4	
10:12 p.m.	8.1	4:19 p.m.	3.3	

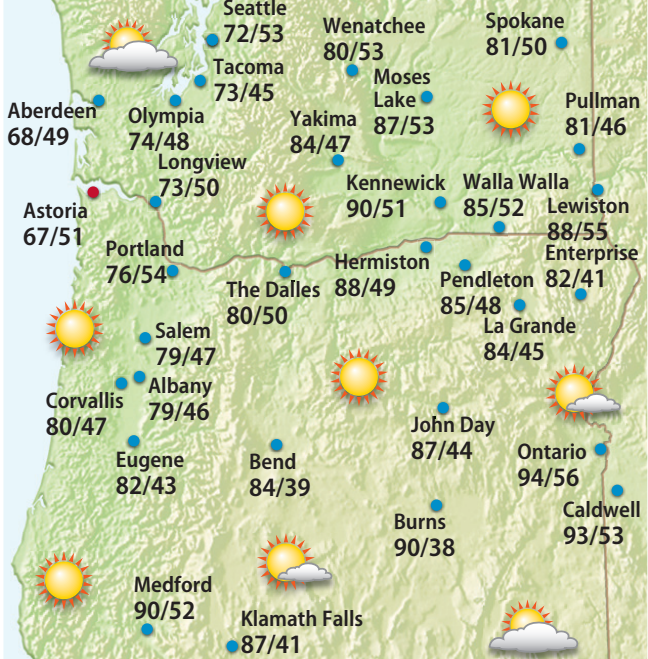
NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today Hi/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W
Atlanta	87/75/t	88/73/t
Boston	78/65/t	78/58/s
Chicago	79/61/s	78/63/s
Dallas	103/81/t	101/81/pc
Denver	84/63/t	88/49/pc
Honolulu	89/78/pc	90/77/s
Houston	98/79/pc	96/78/pc
Los Angeles	85/62/pc	84/62/pc
Miami	92/79/t	92/78/t
New York City	80/65/t	78/62/pc
Phoenix	103/81/pc	97/82/c
San Francisco	74/55/pc	76/57/pc
Wash., DC	83/67/t	82/66/s
Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, l-ice.		

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REGIONAL FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.



City	Today Hi/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W	City	Today Hi/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W
Baker City	86/41/s	72/36/pc	North Bend	66/50/s	67/52/s
Brookings	70/54/s	75/59/s	Roseburg	83/50/s	82/54/s
Ilwaco	65/54/s	65/55/pc	Seaside	66/54/s	68/52/s
Newberg	78/47/s	80/52/pc	Springfield	81/44/s	80/48/s
Newport	63/47/s	63/48/s	Vancouver	75/52/s	79/56/pc