

Vaccines: ‘Rollout in the United States has been a dismal failure’

Continued from Page A1

Teachers and child care providers would also start receiving inoculations that day.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Jan. 12 that it would expand the distribution of vaccine it was holding, creating a possible windfall for states that were worried about scarcity in coming weeks. Federal officials also recommended opening up vaccine availability to those 65 and over once the first group of health workers and people in long-term care facilities were vaccinated.

The earlier time frame was met with much happiness across the state as a sign that more of those most susceptible to serious illness and death from COVID-19 would get inoculations.

But the optimism soon evaporated as federal officials told Brown and Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen that there had been a miscommunication and actually no additional vaccine would be on its way.

“I thought I was losing my mind,” Allen said. “I went back and actually reviewed the actual C-SPAN video of Secretary Azar, and the words he used were ‘releasing the entire supply.’ He talked about physical inventory. It was incredibly clear.”

In response, Brown on Friday announced another schedule for rollout of the vaccine. It underlines an already controversial decision by the governor to place school teachers and staff above the elderly on the priority list.

After the current phase of the vaccinations for medical and health care workers, the next group would be K-12 educators and school workers, who will now begin getting vaccinations starting Jan. 25. That will get schools closer to the governor’s targeted Feb. 15 for reopening in-class teaching.

But older Oregonians who are not in long-term care facilities would be placed into four priority tiers. Those over 80 would begin vaccinations on Feb. 8. Those over 75 come a

week later, on Feb. 15. Those over 70 would begin Feb. 22 and those over 65 on March 1.

Despite criticism that she was putting schooling over lives, Brown has stuck with her decision to prioritize getting schools reopened. She said virtual learning had left many students, particularly in less-affluent school districts, falling behind. She also pointed to an uptick in teenage suicides due to the long isolation.

Brown said she didn’t know if any other state was giving teachers the same higher priority. A federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention model program sent to the states has at-risk elderly in the group to be vaccinated after health care workers and congregate care residents and staff.

“Each state is doing it differently,” Brown said.

Oregon has more than 200,000 doses of vaccine on hand, enough to ensure that the over 120,000 people who have received their first dose but are awaiting the second can be

served. The COVID-19 vaccinations are given in two doses spread between three and four weeks apart.

Brown said that the Trump administration had “pulled the rug” out from under hopeful Oregonians.

“I am demanding answers from the Trump administration,” Brown said. “I am shocked and appalled that they have set an expectation on which they could not deliver, with such grave consequences.”

COVID-19 policy is in the middle of a transition as Trump is replaced by President-elect Joe Biden at noon on Wednesday. Biden has promised a \$20 billion vaccine push once he becomes president, including using the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other agencies to speed up and widen distribution.

“The vaccine rollout in the United States has been a dismal failure so far,” Biden said Friday. “The honest truth is this, things will get worse before they get better. And the policy changes we are going to be making, they’re going to take time to show up in the COVID statistics.”

Biden has set a goal of “100 million vaccine shots into the arms of the American people” by his 100th day in office, April 30.

Brown said she was ready for a more dependable effort from Washington, D.C.

“I am looking forward to working with a federal partner who is competent,” Brown said.

There are new challenges on the horizon. The CDC reported Friday that a variant that spreads 50% faster than the one currently dominant in the United States is rapidly spreading and is expected to be the dominant infection by March.

The variant, known as B.1.1.7, first appeared in the United Kingdom in December, where infection rates sky-

rocketed. It spread to other European countries and has now shown up in California, Colorado and other states. The Oregon Health Authority reported the state’s first case of the variant strain on Friday in Multnomah County.

While no more deadly to each person infected, the higher infection rate of what’s commonly called the “U.K. variant” means rapid growth in cases, hospitalizations and deaths overall.

So far, CDC scientists believe the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines that are in distribution are effective on the variant, but the slower-than expected rollout of vaccines to states and then into residents’ arms is unlikely to keep pace with the exponential growth of infections if the new variant becomes widespread in just over a month.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Fifth virus death reported in county

The Astorian

A fifth Clatsop County resident has died from the coronavirus.

The Oregon Health Authority described the person as an 80-year-old man. He tested positive on Nov. 16 and died on Jan. 3 at his residence. He had underlying conditions. No other information was immediately available.

An obituary for Jerry Danial Nichols, an 80-year-old Svensen man, was paid for by his family and published in The Astorian earlier this month. The obituary said Nichols died in his home from complications of the virus on Jan. 3.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 133,851 cases and 1,803 deaths from the virus statewide as of Monday morning.

Relief: ‘We’re stuck in this yo-yo effect’

Continued from Page A1

Small-business owners lamented that only 25% of the first round of loans could be used for fixed costs such as rent, despite many landlords not offering a break. At least 75% had to go toward payroll, despite many businesses losing most of their customers and furloughing staff. The new round allows up to 40% to be used for fixed costs aside from payroll, which Bonamici said in itself required negotiation.

Lattek closed the inside of Street 14 in March, switching to online ordering and having customers walk up to a window on Commercial Street. He laid off all but three or four people and said he almost didn’t participate in the Paycheck Protection Program.

“I looked at it as a loan, and a loan — even a 1% loan — you’re not making any money with those numbers, the 90% loss of revenue,” he said. “It just doesn’t make any sense.”

Many restaurateurs, like Lattek, spent their loans in two months before learning that they could be spread out over 24 weeks. Lattek said Street 14, which he announced the indefinite closure of in December, is paying rent using a grant from Clatsop Economic Development Resources not tied to payroll.

Nemlowill said Fort George furloughed around 140 employees after restaurant closures were first announced in March. The company eventually got a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program and figured out how to break even with limited dining and to-go options, he said, but lost the momentum when indoor dining was again shut down as local virus cases rose.

“That’s kind of been the hardest thing for us, is just we’re stuck in this yo-yo effect, where we keep rebuilding,” Nemlowill said. “We’ll start trying to bring back people, but just enough people. But then we get shut down again.”

Nemlowill said he plans to apply for a second round of funding once his local lender opens a portal. Lattek said he’s unsure about applying for a second round of loans to cover payroll when indoor dining is still tightly restricted because of the virus.

“There are ways in which I feel like this money could be used better to make sure that we can come back when there is an industry, or there is a market to cater to,” he said.

The restaurant bailout, known as the Real Economic Support That Acknowledges Unique Restaurant Assistance Needed To Survive Act, was left out of the latest \$900 billion stimulus bill and has so far not appeared in Pres-

ident-elect Joe Biden’s proposed \$1.9 trillion relief bill.

But Bonamici said the chances of a relief bill like the Restaurants Act are much better with a new administration.

“We actually came close with the Restaurants Act. It actually had bipartisan support. I know we will continue to fight for the Restaurants Act and other aid ... the stimulus checks that go back into the economy, making sure that we have more testing and vaccinations so we can get people back to school and back to work, so they can start going back to restaurants — all of those things. It does look much more promising.”

Katy Connors, the director of operations at Portland Thai restaurant Hat Yai and head of the Independent Restaurant Alliance of Oregon, reminded Bonamici of how restaurants helped dig the U.S. economy out of the Great Recession.

“We have a humongous net, not only in our culture, but also all of the different industries that surround that,” she said. “So we are not only bailing out restaurants. We’re not only giving grants to restaurants. We’re giving grants to the millions of individuals that interact with our industry every single day, whether that’s wineries, whether that’s farms. And it will improve the ability to sort of help recover in the long term.”

SKANSKA

SUB-BIDS REQUESTED Warrenton School District Improvements

Skanska is requesting Subcontractor bids for the Warrenton Grade School Siding, Flashing and Weather Barrier replacement located at:

Warrenton Grade School
820 SW Cedar Ave.
Warrenton, OR 97146

Scopes of Work currently bidding include:
Work Category #01 Siding, Weather Barrier, Sheet Metal Flashing and Trim Replacement
Work Category #02 Painting

**All bids are due no later than
January 29th at 2PM**

There will be a non-mandatory pre-bid meeting held at the Warrenton Grade School on Monday January 18th at 10am. Contact Derek Bourque for additional details.

All bids are to be submitted to Skanska via Building Connected.

For bid documents and details contact Derek Bourque, derek.bourque@skanska.com
Oregon CCB: 153980

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