

Vaccine: County plans for virtual listening sessions

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Pfizer has requested emergency approval of its vaccine to be administered to children 12 to 15. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is expected to give authorization in mid to late May. The county task force is preparing to vaccinate children 12 to 15 at that time.

"As we get into where we're using the Pfizer vaccine, and making it available to 16- and 17-year-olds, and then probably younger people, we do anticipate that a lot of parents are going to want to come at the same time and get vaccinated with their kids," said Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center services at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, who is leading the county's vaccine task force.

"The Moderna vaccine, the first dose is given and then the second dose is given 28 days later. With the Pfizer vaccine, the first dose is given and then the second dose is given 21 days later. So it would be really inconvenient for a parent to get a different shot than a child if you're going to try to keep both of them on the same schedule. So we do anticipate that we'll have Pfizer clinics where children and parents can come together and get the shot."

Laman said the goal is to have evening and weekend clinics to accommodate family schedules.

Virtual listening sessions

Laman joined Margo Lulich, the county's interim public health director, along with local doctors and Clatsop Community Action to discuss vaccine plans and answer questions from the public on Wednesday and Thursday evenings via Facebook and Instagram.

The county plans on hosting the virtual listening sessions in English and Spanish over the next few weeks.

Laman said the listening sessions are to answer questions and hear feedback on how the task force can improve outreach to younger people.

The county had about 300 spots at vaccination clinics that went unfilled over the past week. Laman said the task force is careful in the way it draws up doses, and will use the 300 unused doses at clinics in the coming week.

The task force anticipates the Food and Drug Administration will allow use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccines to resume. The county still has doses of the one-dose vaccine and plans on admin-

istering the vaccine to people who have difficulty getting to regularly scheduled vaccination clinics.

About 40% of people in the county have had at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the task force, and 87% of residents 70 and older are fully vaccinated.

As of Friday, 25,675 vaccine doses were administered in the county, and 9,440 people were fully vaccinated. The county's goal to reach herd immunity against the virus is vaccinating 27,533 people.

Brown's warning

Meanwhile, Gov. Kate Brown on Friday warned counties of tighter restrictions to come in light of a fourth surge of the virus across Oregon.

"In the race between vaccines and variants, the variants are gaining ground and have the upper hand," Brown said during a press conference. "Today's cases topped a thousand, with Oregon now ranking second in the nation for having the most rapid growth of infection spread. Our doctors and nurses are once again overwhelmed. Our hospitals are about to surpass 300 patients who are positive for COVID-19, crossing the threshold to place several of our counties into extreme risk."

The governor said the state will analyze the data again early next week to see which counties may need to move into extreme risk. If necessary, she said she will cancel the warning week, moving the counties into extreme risk on Friday.

"Please know this is not a step I take lightly," Brown said. "However, it could be the last time we need to impose this level of restrictions, given our vaccination trends and the virus's behavior."

"Vaccines are the absolute key to moving Oregon forward. The overwhelming majority of our new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are people who have not yet been vaccinated. We are seeing younger Oregonians in the hospital now, as well as people who had no underlying health conditions."

"I do think with all of us working together that we can get to a place where we lift most restrictions and fully reopen our economy no later than the end of June. Common-sense safety measures like mask wearing and maintaining 6 feet of distance will need to stay in place. We all need to make smart choices over the next several weeks so that we can move forward and into post-pandemic life."

River cruises: 'We will have a good season'

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American Cruise Lines and American Queen Steamboat launched the 2021 season in mid-March with coastal voyages between South Carolina and Florida and along the Mississippi River between Memphis and New Orleans. The companies instituted enhanced safety measures, such as decreased capacity, mask requirements, testing of passengers and additional medical personnel.

Charles B. Robertson, the CEO of American Cruise Lines, told Travel Weekly that "the popularity of small-ship domestic cruising was stronger than ever before the pandemic, and 2021 demand is already at new record levels."

American Cruise Lines homeported its regional vessels at the North Tongue Point shipyards on the eastern edge of Astoria, where local shipwrights from WCT Marine & Construction have provided maintenance.

Oregon has allowed river cruises to operate, provided they follow CDC guidelines on the water and county-by-county virus guidelines when docked.

Clatsop County on Friday entered the state's high-risk designation for the coronavirus lasting at least two weeks, decreasing the capacity and operating hours at bars, restaurants and other venues. But Bohn and Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones said they worry more about the masses of tourists coming by car than smaller, partially empty cruise ships carrying older passengers more likely to be vaccinated and following enhanced health protocols.

"If they do follow all the state guidelines, there's not really a basis on which to prohibit other operations, especially in the context of the level of tourism that's already taking place in Astoria," Jones said. "Most of the hotels on the coast are full or nearly full."

Health officials expect the cruise companies to follow whatever necessary guidelines based on the county's risk level, Bohn said. "If we go into an extreme-risk level, we'll be talking to the governor's office about what that means," he said.



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

American Cruise Lines homeported all four of its Columbia River cruise ships at North Tongue Point while waiting for the season to start.

Washington state on hold

Cruises on the Columbia and Snake rivers include stops upriver in Washington state, where Gov. Jay Inslee has banned all cruise ship dockings until at least May 15, after which conditions will be reevaluated.

"We spoke with local health jurisdictions, state public health and found that that was the minimum amount of time needed to work through some of the health and safety concerns that are presented by national and international travelers coming to dock at Washington ports," said Jon Snyder, a policy adviser with Inslee's office.

American Cruise Lines often docks at the Port of Skamania in Stevenson, Washington. Pat Albaugh, the port's executive director, said 130 dockings have been canceled over the past year, costing the agency much of its dockside revenue and preventing some seasonal hires.

"The bigger impact was more on the community, because the passengers and the crew, particularly, go and visit our local stores," Albaugh said. "So none of that happened."

Instead of Stevenson, the American Song is expected

to dock in early May at the Port of Cascade Locks. Olga Kaganova, the general manager of the port, said the community welcomes the additional tourism revenue. But she doesn't see the logic of allowing cruise ships on one side of the narrow Columbia channel but not less than 2 miles away in Stevenson.

"These cruise lines, we want them to be able to come out here and have a more consistent experience on both sides of the river," she said. "It's somewhat arbitrary between our community and Stevenson, to draw that line in the middle of the river."

American Cruise Lines cruises usually head upriver to Richland, Washington, before leaving the Columbia for the Snake and ending the trip in Clarkston, Washington. Wanda Keefer, the port manager in Clarkston, said American Cruise Lines is instead negotiating to stop next door in Lewiston, Idaho.

Keefer said local officials have tried to relay to the states how much safer the river cruises are than tourists coming in by car.

"I'm personally confident that those managing the cruise lines have done it thoughtfully with a great deal of intention to the

safety of their passengers," she said. "And they've been consultative with the communities along the way. The cruising has reopened on the Mississippi River. We're not hearing anything about it, because it's successful. So I expect that we will have a good season."

Ocean cruises in doubt

While river cruises slowly start up, the Port of Astoria has canceled all oceangoing cruise ship dockings until the MS Regatta scheduled to come in Sept. 11. The ship had been in berth in Astoria since October, but left in late March for work in Mexico.

The Port has canceled 19 of 28 scheduled ocean cruise ship dockings this year. Will Isom, the Port's executive director, said recently that he expects other short-term berthing opportunities in the next month or so.

"If we do not have regular cruise ship traffic in here this fall, I think it's a good possibility we could have another longer-term berthing in Astoria later this year," Isom said. "So (it was) a bit disappointing to see that vessel leave, because it was good revenue coming in each month. But I think there are going to be opportunities on the horizon."

CLATSOP CARE HEALTH & REHABILITATION CENTER

An update from your local nursing home

As a not-for-profit community supported organization, it's very important to us to keep the community informed of what's happening in our facility. That's why we've decided to share updates each week in the local paper.

EXPANSION TO VACCINATIONS

In an ongoing effort to protect our community and the community at large, Clatsop Care Center is offering anyone who comes in contact with our facility the opportunity to be vaccinated.

We're now able to offer COVID-19 vaccines on an ongoing basis to incoming residents, their visitors, family, and staff. Through our partnership with Consonus Pharmacy, we're able to order the COVID-19 vaccine and administer them on site with the help of our staff nurses.

This Tuesday we successfully administered 6 doses of the Pfizer vaccines to residents and staff! This new development helps us keep our residents, staff, and community safe.

Clatsop Care Center completed the initial round of vaccine clinics in December, January, and February with Walgreens Pharmacy (pictures below).



Thank you for your continued support!

for more information, please visit
www.ClatsopCare.org

CLATSOP CARE
HEALTH DISTRICT

Merkley: 'We want to solve problems'

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districts for partisan advantage. It would make all political contributions over \$10,000 subject to public disclosure, institute automatic voter registration, expand mail-in voting and ban states from what Democrats have called purging tactics against eligible voters.

Republicans have criticized the bill as a power grab by Democrats that would increase the potential for voter fraud. The bill passed the House but is not expected to gather the 60 votes necessary in the Senate to avoid a filibuster led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican.

"The Senate is rigged right now, so that the priorities for the powerful require a simple majority, and the priorities for ordinary families — including the protection of democracy, health care, housing, education, jobs, environmental policy, labor policy, equality of opportunity policy — all of those require a supermajority," Merkley said. "That should just be outrageous. Why should there be a fast lane for the privileged and powerful, and there's a slow lane where McConnell has a veto over everything?"

Katrina Gasser, a business and community liaison

at Tongue Point Job Corps Center, thanked Merkley for his efforts with other Oregon leaders to rescind the elimination of staff houses on campus. Backers of Tongue Point had warned that families at the center could be thrust into a tight housing market.

"There's 15 families here who are just breathing significant sighs of relief," Gasser said.

Gasser said she is hopeful the Biden administration will end a previous Department of Labor shift away from providing staff housing at job corps centers around the U.S. She pushed Merkley to keep trying to overturn the proposed elimination of and cuts to several trades at Tongue Point.

"The administration knows I'm going to be pushing them very hard not to cut these programs," Merkley said. "I feel like there are plenty of folks out there who would really benefit from being able to participate in these programs. They probably need to be enlarged, not shrunk."

Merkley detailed his efforts to get the U.S. Department of Agriculture to include West Coast seafood as part of federal commodity purchases. He and other West Coast senators and representatives sent a letter earlier this month to Tom Vilsack, the agriculture secretary, outlining the dire situa-

tion for seafood demand with so many restaurants closed because of the coronavirus.

"We're pushing for them to do this," Merkley said. "It makes sense. And the seafood's been hit so hard, because Americans eat a lot more seafood at restaurants than at home."

Asked about efforts to increase affordable housing, Merkley said many of the concerns he's raised are priorities shared by the Biden administration and addressed in his proposed \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan. The American Jobs Plan would invest \$213 billion to build, preserve and retrofit affordable housing.

"I'm very optimistic about this administration," Merkley said. "But we have to pass the infrastructure bill to make this happen, and I am worried about that."

"What I saw in the first years of the Obama administration was a philosophy by the minority leader, Mitch McConnell. His philosophy was, 'If I can obstruct and delay things, and things don't get better, then people will vote for my team, and I'll be majority leader instead of minority leader.'"

"And I thought that was very, very cynical, because, really, a republic only works if people come together and say, 'We want to solve problems.'"