

# Virus: ‘Vaccinations work, masks work’

Continued from Page A1

“These capacity levels are not sustainable. Our health system remains under significant stress,” Sidelinger said.

Many counties, including Clatsop, are still seeing significant numbers of new virus cases.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 47 new virus cases for Clatsop County on Thursday and 21 new cases on Wednesday. Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 2,091 virus cases and 25 deaths as of Thursday.

The health authority, in a weekly outbreak report, also revised the virus case count for an outbreak over the summer at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria. The count is at 11 virus cases.

Despite the recent sharp rise in deaths, Oregon’s overall per capita death rate ranks 46th among the 50 states.

COVID-19 trend forecasts from Oregon Health & Science University last month held out the possibility that after dropping through September and October, COVID-19 levels could fall to levels not seen since the very beginning of the pandemic.

But the latest forecasts show a later and slower decline. Hospitalizations are projected to be below 200 per day by Thanksgiving. Oregon residents should hope for the best, but prepare for the virus to once again impede holiday cheer.

“We’re not fortune-tellers,” Sidelinger said. “We will probably all be considering celebrating differently. We may shiver a bit out in the cold.”

The rebound could slow or stall amid challenges from several factors, including Labor Day holiday weekend socializing, K-12 schools reopening to in-class instruction, the



Erick Bengel/The Astorian

**Teresita Sellers, far left, a Columbia Memorial Hospital employee, works in the hospital’s clean laundry room, while, from left, the Oregon National Guard’s William Jensen, noncommissioned officer in charge of sites in Astoria, Seaside and Tillamook; Adam Fodge, noncommissioned officer in charge for Task Force Northwest; Molly Bodrato, a logistics officer; Scott Bushbaum, Oregon National Guard Task Force Northwest commander; and Hannah Kuk, a personnel officer, check out the work being done by their fellow soldiers.**

return of college students and major events such as the Pendleton Round-Up and college football games.

“Every opportunity that brings people together is an opportunity for the disease to spread,” Sidelinger said.

The severity of the flu season and the level of wet and cold weather that may cause people to congregate indoors more could also contribute to infection levels.

All are occurring as the state experiences its highest infection rates of the entire crisis, which is now into its 19th month since the first case in Oregon was reported at the end of

February 2020.

Following masking and social-distance protocols and encouraging anyone who has not been vaccinated to get their shots is the best counterattack.

Those who remain unvaccinated, go unmasked and gather in groups are being selfish because their decisions put others at risk, Sidelinger said.

“Come together as a community,” he urged. “Vaccinations work, masks work.”

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

# RVs: Police are doing everything they can

Continued from Page A1

most of the vehicles are unlicensed or have licenses that are expired. “Those living in the vehicles are dumping sewage on property and streams,” he said, “as well as using the bathroom in the park.”

“Obviously the word is out,” Seaside’s Pamela Schwenzer wrote. “‘Free camping in Seaside with a river view.’ There are no facilities for dumping waste or dirty water. I’m concerned about our river. This is adjacent to a playground and public restroom.

“Having fled Portland four years ago, I have seen how such a setup can attract problems, causing a deterioration in livability in a neighborhood. We left Laurelhurst — I suspect you’ve heard of it.”

City Councilor Tita Montero said there is a lack of clarity between local ordinances, state law and a federal court ruling on homeless camping. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which covers Oregon, has ruled that ordinances against sleeping outdoors on public property when there are no shelters available are unconstitutional.

“We’re also working on pulling information and strategies together so that the council can look at what can we implement, what is going to be legal — first of all — and for the benefit of the whole community,” Montero said.

City Attorney Dan Van Thiel has said police are doing everything they can by creating a constant presence in the area. He said issuing citations is of limited value if people do not show up for court or pay fines. The city has not yet moved to tow vehicles, which he said would come at city expense and could subject the city to litigation.

While trash and unsanitary conditions have been concerns for neighbors, trash has not been an issue among those parked at the city lot, Public Works Director Dale McDowell said. “I have handed out trash bags, and they are picked up several times a week by the Public Works Street Department,” he said.

At Monday’s meeting, Mayor Jay Barber said homelessness is the issue that “kept him awake at night.”

A new state law approved this year requires that local regulations on sitting, lying, sleeping or keeping warm and dry in outdoor public spaces be objectively reasonable for the homeless. The law aims to protect the homeless from fines or arrest for camping on public property when there are no other options. Cities and counties must comply by July 2023.

“If we do not do that, or are unable to do that, then, as I understand this, they are permitted to lie asleep in any public property in our city,” Barber said. “That is truly a challenge.”

# Mural: ‘It really was an unplug for me’

Continued from Page A1

extra courage during long hospital stays. That led to communitywide efforts to create as many bots as possible. Cities commissioned him to create murals. Since 2010, he’s created more than 20 large-scale Botjoy murals in cities like London, Phoenix, Boulder and New Orleans.

But there was more to changing a building’s exterior in Astoria than Yiu realized.

Due to its location in a historic district, she had to apply to the city’s Historic Landmarks Commission for permission to alter the building’s appearance. Undeterred, she pushed forward and collected 75 signatures and held her breath as she nervously appeared at the public hearing in July.

“I prepared myself that someone would come up and say, ‘I don’t like it,’” Yiu said. “But everyone was positive. I was very surprised. It made me almost cry.”

## Volunteers

Yiu and Hirsch provided renderings of the art, and got city approval to do the job. Committed to making this a community project, Yiu called for volunteers to help out. The pair, plus a group of about a dozen volunteers, painted 73 bots onto the wall the last week of August.

“I was painting every day and my muscles were hurting every day, but it really was an unplug for me,” Yiu said.



Nikki Davidson/The Astorian

**Candy Yiu inspects the finished Botjoy mural on the building she purchased on 11th Street.**

“The enthusiasm was exceptional, people were so invested in having something that would bring joy to Astoria,” Hirsch said. “I got zero negative comments on this mural — that’s unusual. We got nothing but gratitude, excitement and participation.”

Now that the mural is completed, Yiu has plans to incorporate the community in her next revitalization mission. She’s made pieces of textiles and markers available in the lot. She asks people to come write what gives them joy. She plans to string them

under coverings she will be adding to the lot to give the picnic tables shelter in the winter months.

Yiu said her new property continues to evolve into a community space. Artist Connie Shea has opened an art gallery in the building. Permits for a restaurant and bar on the other side of the structure are awaiting city approval.

“I just want people to be able to enjoy good food, chill out and be part of the community,” Yiu said. “Remember to smile.”

# Hood to Coast: One of Seaside’s largest yearly events

Continued from Page A1

But city councilors questioned whether the complaints are unique to this year’s Hood to Coast or are being driven on social media by residents with long-standing objections. Hospital administrators also said they have not detected an increase in local virus cases linked to the event.

“They are not a good fit for the city of Seaside,” Jeff Jarrett, a resident, wrote in a letter to the City Council. “I lived on 14th Avenue for eight years watching these runners go by. I received hostile flak from them each year trying to get my vehicle in and out of the street. Eventually, I just leave town each time they do this event. I was not the only one.”

Runners “just run into town, eat their own food on the beach, have their own party and then go home,” he said. “They have no interest in engaging in any coastal activity. No interest in seeing the sights. They are not here to be tourists, they are here to run and go right back home because most of them are only an hour away. ... Enough is enough. Hood to Coast should host their event elsewhere.”

The complaints appeared on Facebook and other social media during the event and grew in intensity over the past few weeks.

“We are all aware that there are a variety of opinions about the event, and all things having to do with the event,” City Councilor Tita Montero said at a council meeting Monday. “There are a lot of things that people purported to be true, that I knew were not true. So that puts that in the realm of rumors.”

While new virus cases were surging in late August, Seaside was not in a state of emergency, City Councilor David Posalski said. “There’s no reason for us to have added additional regulations beyond what the state had put into place for Hood to Coast,” he said.



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

**People on the beach at this year’s Hood to Coast in Seaside.**

## Dogged by complaints

Hood to Coast first moved the finish to Seaside in the late 1980s. Throughout the years, the event has been dogged by complaints about the impacts on residents. In 2015, concerns from residents and businesses about unruly behavior, traffic and poor organization brought angry crowds to City Council meetings and threatened to end the relationship.

In 2018, the city and Hood to Coast renewed the agreement, with an initial payment of \$25,000 to the city that increases each year through 2022, when the relay will pay more than \$30,000. The city provides police, fire and public works services for the event, which raises funds for the Providence Cancer Institute.

Despite the changes, Sandy Rea, a resident and longtime critic of the event, said problems linger.

“Although Hood to Coast offered lip service regarding wearing masks and social distancing, they made no effort to enforce either, while claiming on television to have done so,” Rea said.

Dan Floyd, Hood to Coast’s chief operating officer, said the relay followed state outdoor mask requirements.

“People not wearing masks were either running/walking, eating, drinking, speaking onstage, or performing,” he said after the City Council meeting. “Others not wearing masks were not within the fenced area of our party. That does leave a small group of individuals, or teams, that were not in compliance.”

Floyd said this resulted in the disqualification and 2022 ban of 12 teams.

Jason Plamondon, the chief nursing officer at Providence Seaside Hospital, said he didn’t see a big increase in virus cases after Hood to Coast.

“We were tracking our ER pretty carefully and I didn’t see it,” he said. “We didn’t see a bump in that.”

Judy Geiger, the vice president of patient care services at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, said the virus caseload “stayed steady” for the week to 10 days following the event.

While there had been discussions earlier

this year of canceling the party at the finish, Floyd said, organizers met with the city in advance to get approval for a modified party.

“Traffic was the smoothest it has been in 39 years of Hood to Coast,” he said. “Our post-event participant survey indicated the 97% of respondents would like to participate in Hood to Coast in future years. However, we did have some delays on Highway 30. We identified the problem immediately. Although it took a couple hours to resolve, we are confident that our 2021 remedy will mitigate traffic in future years.”

Montero said, “I don’t care how you feel, positive or negative, about Hood to Coast. This is actually a world-class event, as world class as the Boston Marathon, as the New York Marathon, as any of those other large races throughout the world. We know that wherever we go, 5 to 10% of the people don’t follow through, and don’t do what they’re supposed to do. But that’s not a reason to condemn everything.”

## ‘Keyboard warriors’

This week, Rea started a Facebook group called Cancel Hood to Coast at Seaside. By Thursday, they had 286 members. “Amazing response so far,” she said.

Seaside’s Tiffany Pedersen sees a need for improvement in outreach and traffic management from Hood to Coast organizers. But she supported the relay.

“It was almost embarrassing to see our locals on social media going onto the Hood to Coast page and making all of the tourists feel unwelcome,” she wrote in a letter to the City Council. “With tourism being our highest industry for Seaside, we don’t want to become the town that made an entire event of people feel unwelcome.”

“Keyboard warriors would much rather complain about debris left behind by Hood to Coast than pick up a phone and call Hood to Coast headquarters, or better yet, go outside and just pick it up.”