

# Outbreaks: Omicron wave will peak over the next two weeks

Continued from Page A1

Residents often have age-related underlying health conditions that render them vulnerable to infection and severe illness from the virus. The communal nature of long-term living facilities can make social distancing difficult and allow the virus to spread easily.

Last year, six virus-related deaths were tied to care

homes in Clatsop County. Five were residents of Clatsop Care Memory Community in Warrenton, while the other was a resident of Neawanna By The Sea in Seaside.

The new outbreaks occurred as the omicron variant has caused a spike of virus cases across Oregon.

The health authority reported 79 new virus cases for Clatsop County on

Thursday and 25 new cases on Wednesday.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 3,617 virus cases and 37 deaths as of Thursday.

The omicron variant wave will peak over the next two weeks and begin a steep decline, according to a new state forecast.

Oregon Health & Science University late Thursday projected hospitalizations will

likely peak on Feb. 1 at 1,553 COVID-19 patients.

“Oregon appears to be flattening the curve of hospitalized patients,” the report said. “Infections are likely to peak in the next week and hospitalizations the week after.”

The forecast came as the state continues to see key numbers climb. The number of people in Oregon hospitals with COVID-19 was 981 as of Thursday — 204 more

than the week before.

The leader of Oregon’s hospital association warned on Thursday that a steady increase in COVID patients needing hospital care is pushing the state’s hospitals to a “breaking point.”

Becky Hultberg, the president and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, said during an online news conference that hospitals are treating

dozens of new virus patients a day.

“The next few weeks will be really tough, and it’s important for people to understand that,” Hultberg said.

*The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group. Lynne Terry, of the Oregon Capital Chronicle, also contributed to this report.*



The Liberty Theatre hosts a touring camp of the Missoula Children’s Theatre.

## Liberty Theatre: Searching for a program director

Continued from Page A1

The Liberty will launch a new after-school program in September, offering a year-round formal theater education program. In addition to acting classes for all ages, the staff hopes to train locals to run the show backstage.

The program, called The Brosius Academy, was made possible by a \$100,000 donation from Mike and Laura Brosius, who moved to Astoria in November from Seattle.

The couple has been renovating a Victorian-style home in town for several years. Fans of the arts, they’ve long enjoyed visiting the Liberty.

“It’s a great space,” Mike

Brosius said. “When you think of the size of the community, and the space, just how well it’s been done, it’s obviously a centerpiece for Astoria.”

The retired couple said they are excited to be a part of the community and hope to become more involved.

Mike Brosius has joined the theater’s board. Before his first meeting, he asked what the couple’s donation could do. The staff returned with a pitch for the education program.

“This is what they came up with, which really matches up really well with us because, to me, if we can get just one potential student to be interested in the arts that might not have had the

opportunity, that’s a pretty good use of the money in our opinion,” he said.

The youth curriculum will likely be modeled after those at Northwest Children’s Theater and School in Portland, which has acting lessons and drama exercises for age groups between 4 and 14. The classes will lead up to several student performances a year.

The Liberty plans to partner with local schools and performing arts centers to build the program, and potentially host lessons in different locations. The theater will still be hosting the Missoula Children’s Theatre, a popular touring camp, for at least another two years.

The courses will have tuition, but the Liberty plans on having a scholarship program to cover costs for low-income and underrepresented youth. The theater is also considering after-school transportation options.

Crockett envisions a training program for technical skills preparing them for backstage jobs, and hopes to involve local talent in teaching the classes.

“There are so many great actors in this town, and directors,” she said.

The Liberty has begun searching for a program director to craft the curriculum and plans on making a hiring decision by early March.

## Dispatch: Dispatchers live in different parts of the county

Continued from Page A1

To work around the issue, Knappa Fire Chief Kurt Donaldson said his firefighters use radios — and sometimes cellphones — to communicate with dispatchers.

He described the situation as a “wake-up call.”

“I feel terrible for the dispatchers,” Donaldson said. “I mean, they’re doing great work in a tough situation, and the managers are doing the best that they can do in a tough situation.”

But he said the temporary merger has demonstrated why a single countywide 911 dispatch center is best for the county.

While the talks about consolidation continue, Donaldson said fire agencies across the county have used the situation as an opportunity to meet and come up with a standard operating procedure to create more consistency, which he thinks will benefit fire agencies and dispatchers.

At the other end of the county, Cannon Beach Fire Chief Marc Reckmann recounted how a firefighter was in the middle of a medical call asking for more resources when another call interrupted the exchange.

Earlier this month, during a wind storm, he said the fire district lost the ability to communicate with dispatch over the main channel for a few hours.

He fears calls will be missed.

“Those are very critical things that are going to get

*‘THE CRITICALITY OF THIS SYSTEM IS NOT LOST ON US BY ANY STRETCH. WE LOSE SLEEP ON THIS AT NIGHT. THIS IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT SYSTEM — THAT IT WORKS APPROPRIATELY AND ACCURATELY.’*

Geoff Spalding | Astoria Police chief

somebody killed,” Reckmann said.

**‘We lose sleep on this at night’**

Discussions about consolidation have occurred at various times over more than 20 years, while Astoria and Seaside have continued to invest in separate equipment and infrastructure.

Astoria dispatch made major upgrades as part of a response to a 2015 study by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The study also recommended consolidation.

Other studies over the years that analyzed emergency dispatch in the county also encouraged consolidation. A single countywide 911 dispatch center could maximize staffing and resources, improve call times and enhance coordination, the studies suggested.

One study in 2008 was initiated after the mayors of Astoria, Seaside, Warrenton, Gearhart and Cannon Beach sent a letter to the county Board of Commissioners to investigate consolidation. The mayors said

the time had come to move to a “single, more effective and cost-efficient system.”

Leaders at the Astoria Police Department say the temporary merger over the past few months has given the county practical experience in what the move might look like.

“The criticality of this system is not lost on us by any stretch,” Astoria Police Chief Geoff Spalding said. “We lose sleep on this at night. This is such an important system — that it works appropriately and accurately.”

Spalding said the cities were prepared for some glitches at the start of the temporary merger.

“This was never designed to be a permanent solution,” he said. “It doesn’t make sense to have everybody work out of Seaside. It’s just not a big enough facility.”

“We’re doing the best we can with all the resources we have,” Spalding added. “We feel the frustration. We feel the pain. We feel that also because we’re also users of the system. At the end of the day, we want it to be better,

we want our subscribers to be happy, but I think we’re doing a pretty good job managing a very, very complex technological system.”

While Astoria is supportive of moving toward consolidation, Spalding said dispatch staff are the most significant consideration in the process.

“It has to be a very thoughtful process because the main thing we want to make sure of is that we take care of our people both in Seaside and in Astoria,” he said.

Dispatchers live in different parts of the county, Spalding said. Where would a single countywide 911 dispatch center be located? Who will be in charge? Those are questions dispatchers are rightfully concerned about during the talks, he said.

Seaside City Manager Mark Winstanley thinks another major question is whether consolidation will save taxpayer money.

While he said the dialogue between the cities and county has been positive, he is not sold on the idea.

“The question that’s been posed, if nothing else, is could we coordinate the upgrades that will need to be made to the two centers, so that basically if you work in one, you can work in the other,” Winstanley said.

“These are things we’ve had a lot of conversation about. They also lend themselves to consolidating the two dispatch centers,” he said. “I think it’s good conversation to have.”

## Student: ‘I feel like policy can really create lasting, meaningful impacts for generations’

Continued from Page A1

would travel to Washington, D.C., but due to the coronavirus pandemic, the program will be held virtually.

Each student delegate also receives a \$10,000 college scholarship for undergraduate study. That scholarship, along with another she recently received from the Stand for Children organization, will be impactful in helping Lopez Nestor, who grew up in a low-income household with immigrant parents from Guatemala and Mexico, to further her education.

Lopez Nestor, a senior at Warrenton High School, is eager to expand her knowledge of the political world as she pursues a career in public policy.

“From my previous internship experiences ... I’ve gotten some hands-on experience with how the government works. But I really hope to hear and learn from people who directly work with the U.S. federal government and deepen my understanding about the political process,” she said.

Lopez Nestor has interned with the Oregon Legislature and for Debbie Boothe-Schmidt in her Democratic campaign for House District 32 in 2020. She recently completed a position as a Clatsop County Community Development Department administrative assistant. Along with being

involved in a number of other programs and groups, she is co-executive director of State of the Students, a student-led organization that seeks to build collaboration between students and elected officials.

While Lopez Nestor has made her voice heard through activism, she hopes to achieve similar goals within policy or whichever career path she chooses, such as uplifting underrepresented communities. She believes an increase of young people in political positions will help that cause.

The thought of pursuing a career in public policy did not reach Lopez Nestor until she experienced a powerful and relatable moment while interning in the Legislature.

She read testimony on the Energy Affordability Act from families that had children who wore gloves and extra layers during online schooling due to the cost of providing heat.

“That really resonated with me because I also come from a low-income household and I have the same exact struggles,” she said. “That was the moment that solidified why I wanted to go into policy because it’s not just for me, I am doing this for my communities — for the communities that I represent as an individual.”

“... I feel like policy can really create lasting, meaningful impacts for generations to come.”

### Phone and Internet Discounts Available to CenturyLink Customers

The Oregon Public Utility Commission designated CenturyLink as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier within its service area for universal service purposes. CenturyLink’s basic local service rates for residential voice lines are \$24.00 per month and business services are \$38.00-\$40.00 per month. Specific rates will be provided upon request.

CenturyLink participates in a government benefit program (Lifeline) to make residential telephone or broadband service more affordable to eligible low-income individuals and families. Eligible customers are those that meet eligibility standards as defined by the FCC and state commissions. Residents who live on federally recognized Tribal Lands may qualify for additional Tribal benefits if they participate in certain additional federal eligibility programs. The Lifeline discount is available for only one telephone or qualifying broadband service per household, which can be either a wireline or wireless service. Broadband speeds must be 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload or faster to qualify.

A household is defined for the purposes of the Lifeline program as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline service is not transferable, and only eligible consumers may enroll in the program. Consumers who willfully make false statements in order to obtain Lifeline telephone or broadband service can be punished by fine or imprisonment and can be barred from the program.

If you live in a CenturyLink service area, please call 1-800-201-4099 or visit [centurylink.com/lifeline](http://centurylink.com/lifeline) with questions or to request an application for the Lifeline program.

