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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Clatsop County has among the highest rates of vaccination against the coronavirus in Oregon, but booster shots lag.

Booster shots against the virus lag on the North Coast

County Public Health Department will survey residents to help find out why

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

The Clatsop County Public Health Department is planning a community survey to better understand the reasons behind the less-than-expected rates of booster shots against the coronavirus.

Boosters have been widely available since last fall, when the fallout from the delta variant — the worst wave of the pandemic locally in terms of hospitalizations and deaths — was still felt in the community. Yet the number of residents who have received the extra jab continues to lag behind the county's vaccination rates.

As of Friday, 86.5% of residents 65 and older have completed their initial vaccination series — the two-dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine — compared with 64% who have received a booster, according to the county.

Residents 50 to 64 have a 77.5% vaccination rate, compared with 45.9% who have received a booster.

Residents 20 to 49 have a 67.3% vaccination rate, compared with 27.5% who have received a booster.

And residents 18 to 19 have a 53.4% vaccination rate, compared with 16.2% who have received a booster.

Statewide, 75.5% of Oregon residents 18 and older are fully vaccinated, compared with 44.4% who have had a booster. The gap persists despite evidence that a booster dose significantly decreases the severity of illness and the risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

THE GAP PERSISTS DESPITE EVIDENCE THAT A BOOSTER DOSE SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASES THE SEVERITY OF ILLNESS AND THE RISK OF HOSPITALIZATION AND DEATH FROM COVID-19.

The survey from the Public Health Department will reflect the community's experience during the vaccination campaign, which began early last year, and help the county address ongoing concerns, such as information that needs to be clarified or myths that need to be countered.

The plan to take stock comes as Gov. Kate Brown lifted Oregon's mask mandate, the surge of the omicron variant recedes and the virus case and hospitalization counts dwindle. The governor intends to lift the state emergency over the virus in April.

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State hears feedback on paid leave

Lawmakers pushed back the deadlines

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

An advisory panel is seeking public comments as it writes rules for how Oregon will offer paid family and medical leave.

The Legislature approved the program in 2019 and it was set to start this year. But last year, lawmakers extended the deadlines to January 2023 for the program to collect its first payroll taxes and Sept. 3, 2023 for the first payment of benefits.

Workers will pay 60% and employers will cover 40% of the fund.

Oregon will join eight states and Washington, D.C., with similar programs.

Workers who earn at least \$1,000 during the previous year would qualify for up to 12 weeks of paid family leave, with the maximum benefit set at \$1,215 per week.

"We remain on track and on budget," David Gerstenfeld, the acting director of the Oregon Employment Department, told reporters in a briefing on Wednesday.

Oregon's program is more generous than a proposal last year by President

Joe Biden for a federal program, which would offer up to \$4,000 per month. The U.S. House has passed a program that proposes four weeks of benefits, but it is part of a broader plan of social supports — known as Build Back Better — that has stalled in the U.S. Senate. It is highly uncertain whether a federal program will emerge.

Nine members will advise the Oregon Employment Department on rules required to carry out the law. Gerstenfeld said one rule will focus on how workers obtain benefits.

"Topics include how much money someone may receive in a benefit year, how people apply for paid-leave benefits, how we will verify whether someone is eligible, and if and how workers must give notice to their employers to use paid leave," he said. "This is an opportunity to provide feedback on these rules. There will be more in the coming months."

The advisory committee has scheduled a second virtual meeting from 9 a.m. to noon on Thursday. It held a similar meeting March 10. Advance registration is required for participation: bit.ly/3w1Cdq2

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

Science teacher in Knappa a long way from home

Geografo part of a cultural exchange

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

Jasmin Geografo was one of many who fled urban areas during the coronavirus pandemic in search of rural places with less people and more opportunities for outdoor activities.

But in Geografo's case, the jump was thousands of miles and across the Pacific Ocean.

Through a cultural exchange program, Geografo found her way from Manila, the capital of the Philippines, to the North Coast, where she was hired as a science teacher at Knappa High School in December.

The exchange program offered several different locations in the United States, but the coastal setting sparked her curiosity the most.

"I like the landscape here," Geografo said. "The topography of the area is best for me because Manila is highly urbanized and overpopulated, so when I came here, it was such a refreshing time for me."

For Geografo, the move was as much about personal growth and discovery as it was escaping online education and over-

EVERYDAY people



Jasmin Geografo is on an exchange program from the Philippines.

crowded cities.

"I needed to go through this process of meeting new people and investing in a very unfamiliar place," she said. "... I think this is what I needed to mature and grow professionally, as an individual, and as a member of my community in the Philippines and as a new member in the community that I have here now."

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