

# OHSU: Peak omicron hospitalizations could be half of previous prediction

By FEDOR ZARKHIN  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon's COVID-19 omicron hospitalization peak won't be nearly as bad as forecasters predicted a week ago but still could overwhelm the health care system within weeks with about as many people needing hospital beds as did during the delta wave.

Oregon Health & Science University revised its omicron surge projections Thursday, Dec. 23, down from about 2,400 people hospitalized at the peak of the upcoming surge to about 1,200, provided Oregonians take steps to prevent the spread of infections.

The peak, which is expected to hit in early February, could exceed 1,700 if Oregonians' behavior doesn't change, though it always has in the past when infections have started to climb, OHSU data analyst Peter Graven said.

But while the downward revision could be heartening, the currently predicted wave of hospitalizations could still rival or exceed Oregon's peak in early September.

"The risk of overwhelming hospital systems is real," Graven said. "We're seeing a dire situation."

Graven said he incorporated new, more accurate data from countries fully in the throes of their omicron surges in his COVID-19 forecasting model, allowing him to make more accurate predictions for what will happen in Oregon.

The numbers could be revised down again next week, when Graven said he hopes to produce a forecast with yet more accurate

data. The key variable driving the uncertainty is how likely an omicron infection is to land a vaccinated person in the hospital.

For his latest run at the data, Graven lowered omicron's hospitalization rate, but upped the variant's "immune escape," or the rate at which the virus evades the defenses of immune systems that already had been exposed to the virus. He also upped his estimate of how many people, on average, will get boosters every day. The result showed a dramatically lower peak hospitalization rate.

The peak could end up even lower if Oregon's efforts to get people boosted are particularly successful, according to Graven's modeling.

Omicron-driven cases should start climbing now, Graven said, and hospitalizations soon will follow.

"One way we're going to know we're going to see a lot more breakthrough cases," Graven said.

Oregon Health Authority experts have said the variant likely already is the dominant one in Oregon, though there is such a lag in sequencing data the state does not know for sure.

COVID-19 cases among vaccinated people have consistently accounted for about 30% of known infections since early November. With omicron, people who have had a regular course of two doses of the vaccine appear to be just as likely to get infected as those who haven't been vaccinated, research shows.

The omicron variant appears to



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Registered nurse and firefighter Rachel Lasater administers a dose of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine Sept. 7, 2021, at the East Umatilla County Ambulance Area Health District office in Athena. Oregon Health & Science University on Thursday, Dec. 23, revised its forecast for peak hospitalizations due to the omicron variant from about 2,400 people to about 1,200.

cause milder illness, but spreads so easily and so fast the sheer volume of sick people is expected to send hundreds to the hospital. Having two shots of the vaccine helps prevent serious illness but does not always do so. Boosters are considered the best available option for those who are eligible.

The Oregon Health Authority and Gov. Kate Brown last week put the state on notice after Graven's previous forecast came out, urging 1 million more Oregonians to get a booster shot.

The health authority announced

Dec. 23 it will open four clinics, in addition to the six already in service. The agency has asked providers to double or triple how many doses they administer each week. The health authority also has hired 60 additional vaccinators, who will be sent to help at medical facilities around the state, spokesperson Rudy Owens said.

But the health authority plans to shut down all six of its high-volume clinics for some portion of the holidays, citing health care workers' exhaustion.

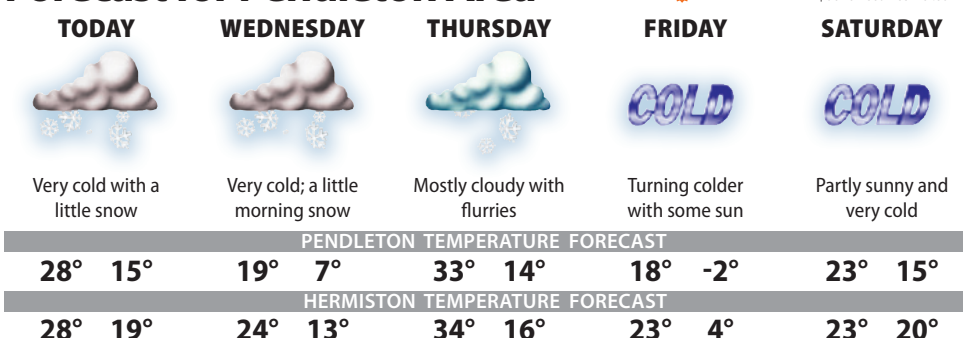
"We want to ensure they get a

much deserved opportunity to rest and spend time with their friends and families," Owens said in an email.

And, per the OHA, the state's clinics aren't the core engine behind the statewide vaccination effort. The high-volume sites will administer about 10% of the shots to be provided statewide, Owens said.

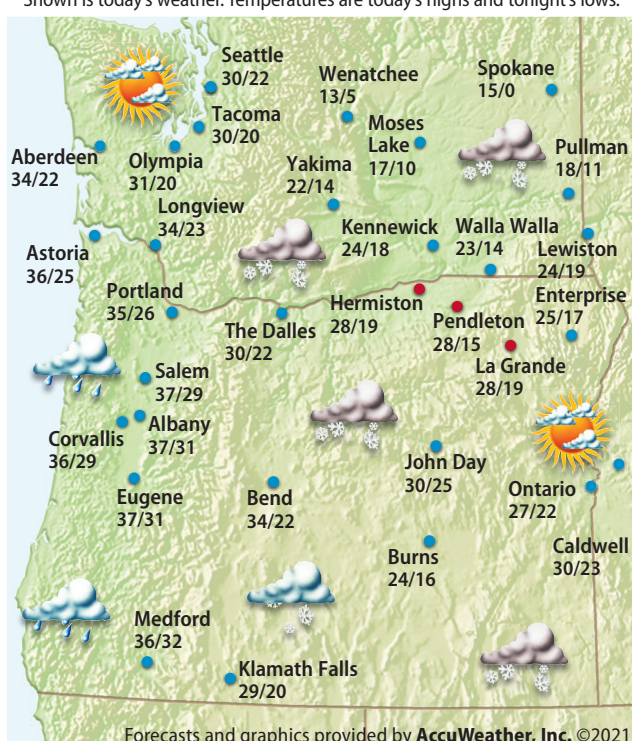
"We believe it will be more efficient and productive to scale up existing providers like clinics and hospitals where we can," Owens said.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

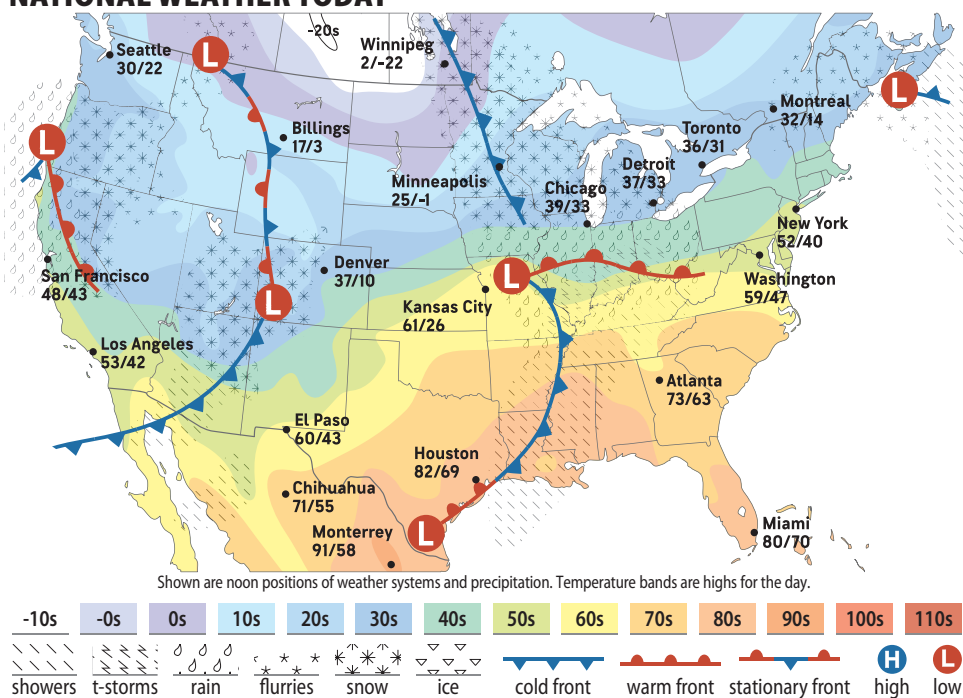
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	18°	13°
Normals	40°	27°
Records	63° (1980)	6° (1924)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	1.52"	
Normal month to date	1.31"	
Year to date	8.90"	
Last year to date	13.06"	
Normal year to date	13.04"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	20°	16°
Normals	42°	28°
Records	63° (1955)	6° (1983)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"	
Month to date	1.56"	
Normal month to date	0.97"	
Year to date	6.63"	
Last year to date	4.46"	
Normal year to date	8.49"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Wed.	
Boardman	NE 4-8	NNE 4-8
Pendleton	NW 4-8	WNW 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:35 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	4:18 p.m.	
Moonrise today	1:22 a.m.	
Moonset today	12:42 p.m.	
New	First	Full
Jan 2	Jan 9	Jan 17
Jan 25		

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 87° in Kingsville, Texas Low -34° in Gold Butte, Mont.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Steelhead fishing on Columbia River still off limits above The Dalles Dam

East Oregonian

SALEM — State regulators have closed steelhead fishing into 2022 for the mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam upstream to the border of Oregon and Washington.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced the closure in a press release Wednesday, Dec. 22. The ban on steelhead extends into the mid-Columbia tributaries of the Deschutes, John Day, Umatilla and Walla Walla rivers.

The decision is to protect summer steelhead. Even though it soon will be 2022, steelhead from summer's record low upriver run remain in the mainstem Columbia River and tributaries above The Dalles Dam, according to ODFW. The passage of approximately 67,750 fish at Bonneville Dam this year was 70% of the forecast and the lowest return on record.

Oregon and Washington fishery managers since 2017 have implemented a number of fishery restrictions throughout the Columbia River and various tributaries due to the declining steelhead returns. Protective regulations have included broad area and time closures, one-steelhead bag limits when open, thermal angling sanctuaries and hoot-owl restrictions (closing fishing at 2 p.m. before temperatures are warmest).

In addition to protecting wild summer steelhead, fishing closures have helped ensure hatcheries throughout the system were able to collect sufficient broodstock to spawn the next generation of hatchery steelhead.

While recent summer steelhead returns have been poor, the press release stated there are hopeful signs that conditions for salmon and steelhead may improve in the Columbia Basin in coming years. The Pacific Northwest is in a La Nina cycle, which delivers cooler ocean temperatures and more rain and snow that may help alleviate the drought and improve habitat conditions for salmon and steelhead.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates ocean conditions off Oregon in 2021 were the second-best since sampling of ecosystem indicators started in 1998. These improved conditions should result in better ocean survival and subsequent adult returns.

Although many steelhead fisheries have been constrained in recent years, opportunity remains available. Per permanent regulations, fishing for hatchery winter steelhead is open in the Columbia River downstream of The Dalles Dam and in most adjacent tributaries.

Anglers can fish for summer steelhead in segments of the Imnaha, Umatilla and Grande Ronde rivers where return data indicates broodstock needs will be met and impacts to wild fish will be low. The bag limit for hatchery steelhead will increase to two fish beginning Jan. 1 in the Snake River from Lewiston to Hells Canyon Dam.

Because poor summer steelhead returns may persist in the near-term, according to the press release, fish biologists across the region will be coordinating on future protective measures while considering equitable sharing of the conservation burden.

## IN BRIEF

### Construction bid for new Wallowa clinic gets the OK

WALLOWA — The Wallowa County Health Care District Board of Trustees on Dec. 13 accepted the bid of Wellens General Contractors to remodel the former Fox Archery location in Wallowa into the new location of the Wallowa Memorial Medical Clinic.

"The people of Wallowa deserve to have a premier clinic that does not require an hour round-trip trek to garner health care services," Wallowa Memorial Hospital CEO Larry Davy said in a press release. "It is our mission to provide premier care to the residents of Wallowa County. A professional clinic in Wallowa is the next piece in delivering on that mission. We are so thankful for the commu-

nity's support and the approval of the board."

According to the release from Wallowa Memorial Hospital and Clinics, the approval of the bid is the next step in getting the roughly \$3 million project going.

"We couldn't be more excited to bring consistent, quality care back to the people of Wallowa," said Nancy Crenshaw, a Wallowa resident and Health Care District Board member since 2018.

The new clinic, which is on track to open sometime in 2022, will be a state-of-the-art clinic similar to the one recently built in Joseph. The roughly 5,400-square-foot building will have six exam rooms, a behavioral health room, a community conference room and a physical therapy room. The clinic will be open five days a week.

—EO Media Group

**CORRECTIONS:** The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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