

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## Indoor mask mandate set to end in March

**Officials: Oregon is 'past its peak' for COVID-19 cases due to the omicron variant**

By **ELIZABETH MILLER**  
*Oregon Public Broadcasting*

SALEM — Citing a projected drop in hospitalizations next month, Oregon health officials announced an end to indoor mask require-

ments in public places “no later than March 31.”

That end of March timeline also includes mask requirements inside schools, Oregon Health Authority officials said Monday, Feb. 7.

With the state’s temporary indoor mask mandate rule set to expire Feb. 8, OHA officials needed to file a new permanent rule with the Oregon secretary of state, if they wanted to maintain the requirement. But, in response to vocal criticism of “permanent rules” at hearings last

month, state health officials said the mandates wouldn’t last forever.

Now, citing health scientists’ projections that “400 or fewer Oregonians would be hospitalized with COVID-19” by late March, officials have given a sunset for the rule extension.

“The evidence from Oregon and around the country is clear: masks save lives by slowing the spread of COVID-19,”

said state health officer Dr. Dean Sidelinger in a release Feb. 7 announcing the news.

Mounting evidence that omicron cases are declining has led Oregon to join a growing number of states that are relaxing indoor mask rules.

“We should see COVID-19 hospitalizations drop by the end of March because so many Oregonians are wearing masks and taking

other steps to protect themselves and each other, such as getting a booster shot or vaccinating their children,” Sidelinger said. “At that point, it will be safer to lift mask rules.”

Hospitalizations remain above 1,000 daily, filling Oregon hospitals. Oregon health officials say the average number of new COVID-19 cases has dropped about 40% over the last week.

“By the end of next month, we’ll be in a place where disease rates should

be much lower, hospital capacity much less strained, and we can move to a more individual and community-based approach to masking requirements and mask use,” Sidelinger said.

Although state models show hospitalizations peaking at 1,169 before declining, Sidelinger said Oregon is “past its peak.” The latest numbers from OHA show hospitalizations at 1,092.

There have been 6,181

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Sidelinger

## Nationwide blood deficit hits region

By **ALEX WITTWER**  
*EO Media Group*

Blood doesn’t last long. Platelets last only five days, according to the American Red Cross, while red blood cells will last up to 42 days. Plasma can last up to one year if frozen. Nor can blood be manufactured; the supply of blood relies entirely on donors rolling up their sleeves.

The American Red Cross, which held a nationwide blood drive in January including several blood donation stations in Eastern Oregon, reports it is facing a blood crisis. The organization’s website stated its blood supply is at the lowest levels in more than a decade. The alarm was sounded last month during National Blood Donor month.

“While some types of medical care can wait, others can’t,” said Dr. Pampee Young, chief medical officer of the Red Cross. “Hospitals are still seeing accident victims, cancer patients, those with blood disorders, like sickle cell disease, and individuals who are seriously ill who all need blood transfusions to live, even as omicron cases surge across the country. We’re doing everything we can to increase blood donations to ensure every patient can receive medical treatments without delay. We cannot do it without more donors. We need the help of the American people.”

### Local hospitals react to shortage

The national blood shortage has hit uneven ground in Eastern Oregon, with area hospitals reporting their blood supply falling below critical levels.

Most hospitals are handling it well, given the circumstances, while others have begun to feel the effects. Most blood that is donated goes to local hospitals, according to Caitlin Cozad, marketing and communications director for Good Shepherd

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## CYCLE OREGON

# Back in the saddle

After getting canceled by pandemic in 2020, Cycle Oregon will roll again this fall

By **BENNETT HALL**  
*Blue Mountain Eagle*

**J**OHAN DAY — One of Oregon’s premier outdoor recreation events will be coming to Grant and Wheeler counties this fall, bringing more than 1,000 visitors and significant economic impacts to the area.

The Portland-based nonprofit Cycle Oregon announced last week that it will stage its biggest ride of the year in the area this September. Dubbed “Ride the Painted Hills,” the event will run Sept. 10-17, starting and finishing in John Day and taking in some of the region’s most spectacular scenery.

The ride was initially supposed to happen in September 2020, but the organization called it off as it became clear that the coronavirus pandemic was going to be around for a while. A handful of scaled-down events were held in 2021, but this year the group is ready to hit the road full force.

“We’re just really excited about going out in 2022,” Cycle Oregon Executive Director Steve Schulz told the Blue Mountain Eagle.

### An Oregon tradition

Since 1988, Cycle Oregon has brought together cycling enthusiasts once a year for group rides in various parts of the state. The first installment, which attracted around 1,000 participants, was a six-day, 350-mile jaunt from Salem to Brookings.

The idea caught on, and one annual ride has grown into a four-course menu for serious cyclists. In addition to the weeklong Classic, Cycle Oregon also offers a pair of two-day options, the Weekender and the Gravel (being held this year in Corvallis and Toledo, respectively) and the one-day Joyride, a women-only pedal in the Independence area.

All rides are supported, with meals, camping facilities, showers and restrooms provided, and there’s a “sag wagon” available to pick up riders who get injured, suffer mechanical breakdowns or just run out of gas. A festive atmosphere surrounds the rides, often with live music and local beer and wine.

There also is a public service component:



Contributed Photo/Cycle Oregon

Cycle Oregon is coming to Grant County in September 2022 after being forced to cancel a planned ride in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Classic participants are encouraged to take part in public service projects in some of the host communities, and Cycle Oregon has its own grant program. Through a fund housed within the Oregon Community Foundation, the group has awarded 328 grants totaling \$2.5 million to support projects and programs around the state.

### What to expect

After spending the night of Sept. 10 in John Day, the group will pedal to Monument on the first full day of riding. From there they’ll go to Fossil, then Mitchell, then Dayville and back to John Day. There will be a couple of layover days along the way, with a selection of activities planned, and each day’s ride will feature at least two options to choose from.

Depending on which options they select, participants will cycle anywhere from 272 to 443 miles with about 15,000 to 35,000 feet of elevation gain.

This year’s Classic is capped at 1,500 riders, but Schulz has no doubt it will reach that mark.

“There’s a lot of uncertainties right now, but we feel like we’ll hit that capacity,” he said.

### Economic impact

As you might expect, Cycle Oregon is not

cheap: The base fee for this year’s Classic is \$1,250 per rider, and the cost can climb from there with add-on options such as tent set-up and porter service.

But while those fees go to Cycle Oregon, there’s plenty of additional money to go around, Schulz said.

On average, he said, Cycle Oregon participants spend between \$200 and \$250 apiece during the weeklong Classic rides. In addition to the riders, there’s a crew of 50 to 100 service providers (food service workers, bike mechanics, emergency medical technicians, the people who set up and take down the portable toilets and showers) who travel with the group, and they also tend to spend money along the way.

“It’s a full-on operation; it’s no joke,” Schulz said. “There’s a lot of people it takes to pull it off.”

On top of that, Cycle Oregon typically reaches out to local community groups (think Boy Scout troops, high school sports teams and service clubs) to do a variety of chores, from handing out water bottles to serving food and cleaning up campsites. In exchange for their hard work, those groups get stipends. For a weeklong Classic, Schulz said, that gener-

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## District looks to define itself amid superintendent search

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — In the process of finalizing a brochure to sell candidates on applying for the Pendleton School District’s open superintendent position, the school board had to reckon with how to disclose and describe the district’s challenges.

At a meeting Jan. 26, the Pendleton School Board met with search consul-

tants Sergio Hernandez and Bill Jordan after the pair had conducted a series of focus groups and surveys. Hernandez and Jordan used the input from students, staff and community members to create a brochure that would promote the position and the district, but they wanted final approval from the board before attaching the brochure to job ads.

One of the points of contention from the board was about a section entitled “challenges and opportunities.” Board

member Patrick Gregg, an attorney by trade, said he felt including a section on challenges might have a “chilling effect” on who applies for the job.

“Yes, there are challenges,” board member Beth Harrison said. “We aren’t going to try to hide those. But I don’t think we want to lead with them.”

Jordan said listing challenges acted as a good screening tool because it could deter unqualified candidates from applying. Hernandez added that

being transparent about the district’s challenges help candidates develop informed answers when asked about them during the interview process. The board opted to make a list of challenges available to candidates, but to keep it separate from the brochure.

But it wasn’t just the challenges’ inclusion that concerned the board, but what the challengers were, includ-

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