

MASKS from A1

Health is working with PeaceHealth Oregon and McKenzie Willamette Medical Center to report COVID-19 hospitalizations. As of Tuesday, 64 people were hospitalized in the county, 33 of them county residents. Fourteen of the state's COVID-19 ICU patients are in Lane County.

This recent surge is attributed to the Delta variant of COVID-19, which Oregon Health Authority (OHA) said on Tuesday accounts for nearly 100 percent of Oregon's new cases.

"COVID-19 vaccines remain the strongest prevention tool against the rapidly spreading Delta variant," OHA wrote in its news release. "OHA anticipates outbreaks will continue to occur, particularly in communities with low vaccination rates."

Since late July, OHA has recommended that all persons, regardless of their vaccination status, wear a mask indoors in public spaces. OHA also encourages all Oregonians to consider masking if they plan to attend crowded outdoor events, especially if they are at higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or live with individuals who are

unvaccinated or at higher risk for complications from COVID-19.

Lane County's Emergency Public Health Advisory "specifically calls for all individuals, businesses and employers to ensure that indoor masking is adhered to for those older than five years of age (two and older if tolerated), regardless of vaccination status; maintaining distance from individuals outside of immediate households when inside indoor shared spaces; practicing good hand washing and sanitation hygiene; and other relevant measures as necessary to limit ongoing community spread and save lives in Lane County, and should begin or be resumed immediately for anyone who hasn't yet adopted these practices."

Earlier this week, Multnomah County adopted a similar mask measure.

The governor supported this message by stating that city and county leaders have asked her for local control and the ability to make local public health decisions when it comes to COVID-19. Brown then thanked the county's leaders for "taking bold action to slow the spread of the Delta variant in our communities."

She also said action could not stop with just one or two counties.

"I am calling on local leaders to take action now to institute mask requirements," Brown stated. "At this point in the pandemic, local leaders are in a unique position to help deliver the message to members of their communities about effective safety measures like vaccination and masks. But the fact remains, we have a finite number of staffed hospital beds in Oregon. If local leaders continue not to act and their regional hospitals exceed their capacity, it will impact hospitals all across the state. We will continue to explore statewide health measures necessary to stop the Delta variant from stretching Oregon hospitals beyond their full capacity."

In the state, breakthrough cases — where fully or partially vaccinated individuals test positive for COVID — make up roughly 20 percent of the current cases.

"The latest science is clear: although unvaccinated individuals are more likely to contract the disease, both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can spread the Delta variant," Brown said. "Masks are a simple and effective way to make sure you are not unknowingly infecting your friends, family members, neighbors and

colleagues."

New modeling from OHA and Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) projects that, without new health and safety interventions in place, COVID-19 hospitalizations will far exceed Oregon's health system capacity in the next several weeks.

Without these additional mitigation measures, Oregon could be as many as 500 staffed hospital beds short of what will be needed to treat patients hospitalized for any reason by September.

"There are two keys to saving lives. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your family against severe illness, hospitalization and death. And, by wearing masks, all of us — vaccinated and unvaccinated — can help ensure that a hospital bed staffed by health professionals is available for our loved ones in their time of need," Brown continued. "If we all do our part, we can beat COVID-19 once and for all, keep our economy open and thriving, and return our kids to the classroom with minimal disruptions in a few weeks."

The governor also announced that all State of Oregon executive branch employees will be required to be fully vaccinated on

or before Oct. 18, or six weeks after a COVID-19 vaccine receives full approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, whichever is later.

The requirement will apply to all executive branch employees, including employees working for all Oregon state agencies, and in consultation with Oregon's statewide elected officials, employees of the Oregon State Treasury and the Oregon Secretary of State's Office, as well as employees of the Oregon Bureau of Labor & Industries and the Oregon Department of Justice.

Employees will be required to show proof of vaccination by the deadline. Individuals unable to be vaccinated due to disability or sincerely held religious belief may be able to qualify for an exception, as required by state and federal law. State of Oregon employees will not have the option of weekly testing instead of showing proof of vaccination.

"Vaccines are safe and effective, and they are the surest way to prevent Oregonians from ending up in intensive care units," said Brown. "I am taking action to help ensure State of Oregon workplaces are safe for employees and customers alike, and I am strongly encourag-

ing all public and private employers to follow suit by requiring vaccination for their employees. The only way we can stop the spread of COVID-19 for good is through vaccination."

The vaccination requirement does not apply to employees of Oregon's legislative and judicial branches of government, though the governor is encouraging the leadership of both branches to consider a similar requirement.

"After a year and a half of this pandemic, I know Oregonians are tired of health and safety restrictions. This new mask requirement will not last forever, but it is a measure that can save lives right now. It will help to protect all of us, including people who are immunocompromised and our children under 12 who are not yet eligible to get vaccinated," Brown said. "Masks are a simple and effective tool that will keep our schools, businesses, and communities open."

To learn more about COVID-19 and vaccination efforts in Oregon, visit healthoregon.org/coronavirus and covidvaccine.oregon.gov, as well as lanecounty.org/coronavirus and lanecounty.org/vaccines.

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