

Local & State

MORE THAN 40 PEOPLE INFECTED WITH DISEASE IN WASHINGTON, OREGON

Measles outbreak revives debate over exemptions to vaccinations

By Gillian Flaccus
Associated Press

VANCOUVER, Wash. — A measles outbreak near Portland has revived a bitter debate over so-called “philosophical” exemptions to childhood vaccinations as public health officials across the Pacific Northwest scramble to limit the fallout.

At least 44 people in Washington and Oregon have fallen ill in recent weeks with the extraordinarily contagious virus, which was eradicated in the U.S. in 2000 as a result of immunization but arrives periodically with overseas travelers. More than a half-dozen more cases are suspected, and people who were exposed to the disease traveled to Hawaii and Bend, Oregon, raising the possibility of more diagnoses in the unvaccinated.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee last week declared a state of emergency because of the outbreak.

“I would hope that this ends soon, but this could go on for weeks, if not months,” said Dr. Alan Melnick, public health director in Clark County, Washington, just north of Portland. The county has had most of the diagnosed cases so far.

Of the confirmed cases, 37 are people who were not immunized. Most of the confirmed cases have been children under 10. Authorities said Friday one case was a person who had received one dose of the measles vaccine.

“The measles vaccine isn’t perfect, but one dose is 93 percent effective at preventing illness,” Melnick said. “The recommended two doses of the measles vaccine provide even greater protection — 97 percent.”

The outbreak has lawmakers in Washington state revisiting non-medical exemptions that allow children to attend school without vaccinations if their parents or guardians express a personal objection. Liberal-leaning Oregon and Washington have some of the nation’s highest statewide vaccine exemption rates, driven in part by low vaccination levels in scattered communities and at some private and alternative schools.

Four percent of Washington secondary school students have non-medical vaccine exemptions. In Oregon, which has a similar law, 7.5 percent of kinder-

garteners in 2018 were missing shots for non-medical reasons.

Washington and Oregon are among 17 states that allow some type of non-medical exemption for vaccines for “personal, moral or other beliefs,” according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Numerous studies have shown vaccines do not cause autism — a common reason cited by those who don’t want their kids immunized. Those opposed to certain vaccines also object to an outside authority mandating what they put in their children’s bodies, and some have concerns about the combination of the measles vaccine with the mumps and rubella immunizations, which is how it’s routinely given.

A measure introduced by Republican Rep. Paul Harris of Vancouver, Washington — the epicenter of the current outbreak — would remove the personal exemption specifically for the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, or MMR. It’s scheduled for a public hearing in Olympia on Feb. 8.

Democratic Rep. Monica Stonier of Vancouver, a co-signer on the bill, said she would prefer an even broader proposal, but “right now we’re looking at what we can get moved.” Previous attempts have failed.

“We’re trying to respond to a very specific concern here and recognize that there may be broader concerns we can consider down the road,” Stonier said.

Oregon has the nation’s highest statewide vaccine exemption rates, and some communities have rates that are even higher. Washington’s exemption rate, although lower, is also high when compared with other states. Nationwide, the median exemption rate for at least one vaccine for the children entering kindergarten in the 2017-2018 year was just over 2 percent.

Oregon state Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, a Democrat and family physician, dropped an attempt to revoke the state’s non-medical exemption in 2015 after virulent opposition. The Legislature now requires parents to either watch an educational video or talk to a doctor before claiming the exemption.

In Washington state, legislation that

would have removed the personal or philosophical belief allowance never made it to the House floor for a vote in 2015 amid stiff opposition.

The National Vaccine Information Center, which opposes mandatory vaccination laws, said it opposed that bill and the current one. Another anti-vaccination group, Informed Choice Washington, had its members at the statehouse on Thursday trying to dissuade lawmakers.

“People are feeling extremely oppressed and feeling like they can’t make an educated decision,” said Barbara Lee Fisher, co-founder and president of the group. She said the legislation would “bring a hammer down and threaten people instead of allowing them to make informed decisions.”

California is one of the few states that stripped away personal belief vaccine exemptions for children in both public and private schools. The law passed in 2015 after a measles outbreak at Disneyland sickened 147 people and spread across the U.S. and into Canada. It occurred despite an earlier law that required parents to talk to a doctor to opt out of vaccines. Vermont also abandoned its personal exemption in 2015.

California state Sen. Richard Pan, a pediatrician who sponsored his state’s bill, said he got death threats over it and had anti-vaccination advocates jam his phone lines and harass him on social media.

The overall vaccination rate for children entering kindergarten in California rose to 95 percent in the two years after the law passed. Parents who don’t want to immunize their children can homeschool or enroll their children in independent study at the local public school.

Measles is still a big problem in other parts of the world, and travelers infected abroad can bring back the virus, causing periodic outbreaks.

Last year, there were 17 outbreaks and about 350 cases in the United States. Before mass vaccination, 400 to 500 people in the U.S. died of the measles every year. Serious complications include brain swelling that can cause blindness or deafness and pneumonia.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Soil-water districts plan meetings

Baker County’s soil and water conservation districts have scheduled meetings for February. All meetings are open to the public and meals are available for those who RSVP by calling Tara at 541-523-7121, extension 100.

- Baker Valley — Feb. 5 at noon at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive at Baker City.
- Burnt River — Feb. 5 at 5:30 p.m. at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive at Baker City.
- Eagle Valley — Feb. 11 at noon, location to be announced (call the above phone number for details).
- Keating — Feb. 12 at noon at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive at Baker City.

Community Connections receives grant

Wells Fargo Housing Foundation has awarded a \$3,000 grant to Community Connection of Northeast Oregon for the organization’s work on foreclosure avoidance counseling.

Community Connection provides counseling to homeowners at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure. Last year, Community Connection’s efforts in foreclosure avoidance counseling saved homeowners a total of \$448,732.65 and saved 38 homes from foreclosure.

Bunco night fundraiser for MOPS

A Valentine-themed Bunco night for women that’s also a fundraiser for a local mothers’ group is set for Feb. 7 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Baker City Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane.

Cost is \$5. Snacks will be provided. Proceeds benefit the local MOPS group — Mothers of Preschoolers.

County planners to hear cell tower plan

The Baker County Planning Commission will have a public hearing Feb. 12 to consider a request for a conditional-use permit to build a cellphone tower on private land near Unity.

The applicant is New Cingular Wireless. The company wants to build a 199-foot-high tower on land owned by Bill and Nancy Moore. The tower would fill a gap in cellular service coverage for AT&T customers in the Unity area, according to the Baker City-County Planning Department.

The public hearing will start at 5 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Copies of the application and other documents are available by email for no cost. More information is available by calling Eva Henes at 541-523-8219, by email at ehene@bakercounty.org or by visiting the Planning Department in the basement of the Courthouse.

Social media classes set for businesses

Two seminars focusing on helping businesses use social media and digital media are set for Feb. 13 and 20 at the Blue Mountain Community College Baker City campus, 3275 Baker St.

The courses through the Small Business Development Center will be led by Michael Mettler, founder and director of possibilities at MCM Strategic + Communications in Walla Walla, Washington.

- Feb. 13, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. — “Next Level Digital Advertising: Cost Effective Marketing Strategies In Rural Markets”
- Feb. 20, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. — “Content is King: Building a Two-Way Conversation Online”

Each seminar costs \$59, payable to the Small Business Development Center. More information is available by calling Andrea Fowler at 541-278-5833 or at the Small Business Development Center’s Facebook page.

Wildland fire refresher course set

Eastern Oregon Training Group will have the RT-130 Wildland Fire Refresher course on April 13 in Baker City. The course will start at 8 a.m. at the 5J School District Building, 2090 Fourth St. Cost is \$100. All participants should bring gloves for the practice fire shelter deployment.

Registration can be done at oregonfiretraining.com. Pre-registration is requested; the cost will be \$120 at the door. This is a required class for all federal and state contractors. More information is available by calling Laurel Goodrich at 541-403-0907 or Jeff Sherman at 541-519-6213.

HEART TO HEART

BLM staff thankful for support during government shutdown

The staff of the Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, including the Vale and Baker City offices and National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the many businesses, organizations, partners and individuals who supported us during the recent government shutdown.

Our employees take as much pride in giving to the communities we serve by volunteering or participating in a wide range of programs and organizations as

you do in the care of your public lands.

Having that care and support returned in the past weeks was deeply appreciated. From free haircuts and admission to school sporting events to donations of supplies, and discounts on services or merchandise, to simple gestures of goodwill, your generosity and support gave us all a much-needed boost to our spirits.

Several entities went above and beyond, providing extra care and stewardship to your public lands when we were unable to do so. Malheur and Baker County sheriff’s deputies beefed up

patrols of BLM roads and sites, and the members and supporters of the Friends of the Owyhee collected trash and monitored some of our most popular recreation areas.

We look forward to continuing to work with you as public servants and community members. We ask that you continue to be patient in the coming weeks as we catch up on our workload and get things moving again.

Again, thank you all.

Larisa Bogardus
BLM Public Affairs Officer
Baker City



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Tuesday	Lasagna.....	\$8.95
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Thursday	Chicken Fried Steak.....	\$9.95
Friday	All You Can Eat Mini Shrimp.....	\$9.95
	Steak & Shrimp.....	\$10.95
	Pan Fried Oysters.....	\$10.50
Saturday	NY Steak.....	\$13.95
Sunday	Old Fashioned Steak Dinner.....	\$13.95

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BUFFETS

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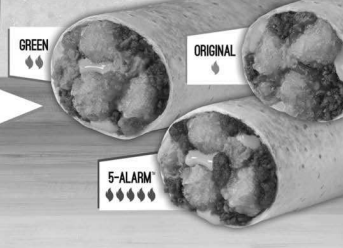
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