

# Oregon expanding vaccine eligibility

■ With a 'fourth wave' of infections underway, state will offer vaccines to everyone 16 and older starting April 19

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Facing a "fourth wave" of COVID-19, Oregon will drop eligibility restrictions for COVID-19 vaccinations April 19, up to two weeks earlier than planned.

President Joe Biden directed Tuesday morning, April 6, that states should open inoculation appointments to everyone age 16 and older.

Oregon had previously planned to drop all eligibility restrictions by May 1, with some counties possibly offering appointments as early as April 26.

Gov. Kate Brown said Oregon would drop limits on April 19 but until then, it would continue to prioritize vaccinations for people with underlying medical conditions, essential workers, and communities underserved during the pandemic.

"We are locked in a race between vaccine distribution and the rapid spread of COVID-19 variants," Brown said.

The move comes as infections and hospitalizations have started to rise after a long decline since January.

The state has reported over 400 cases per day in the past week and has seen rising numbers of hospitalizations, despite having fully vaccinated over 777,000 of the state's estimated 2.8 million adult residents.

An Oregon Health & Science University forecast released last week estimated the current spike



Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Pool/AP File

Medical professionals from Oregon Health & Science University load syringes with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at a drive-thru vaccination clinic in Portland in January.

will lead to an average of 1,000 cases per day by next month.

Evidence of the virus rebound was also found in the latest infection risk level ratings for Oregon's 36 counties, issued later Tuesday.

After a steady trend of counties moving lower in the four-tiered risk ratings, the report this week showed a number of counties with infections on the rise, requiring a return to tighter controls on activities, gatherings and dining.

While COVID-19 deaths have continued to stay lower than previous peaks, health officials have remained concerned about possibly more virulent variants of COVID-19 spreading across the country and into Oregon.

Health officials are worried about highly contagious and potentially more lethal variants of the original virus that has killed 2.86 million people around the globe, including 556,000 in the United States.

Oregon has maintained some of the lowest infection rates and death totals in the nation, but has still reported just under 2,400 deaths.

"Impending doom," is how Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control, last week described the combination of spreading viruses and relaxed safety habits by a pandemic-weary public.

The CDC has singled out one variant originally found in the United Kingdom — B.1.1.7 — as the main version of the virus hitting

about two-thirds of the country. The Oregon Health Authority has reported 19 cases of the U.K. variant in Oregon, but believes there are many more.

Biden's announcement on Tuesday is the second time a White House directive has changed Oregon's phased vaccine eligibility timeline.

Brown and the OHA had originally set July 1 as the earliest date that a long series of priority groups would be finished and the vaccine could be offered to anyone that wanted a shot.

On March 11, Biden issued a directive that states drop all barriers to eligibility no later than May 1 as a way to speed-up vaccination rates. Oregon condensed the timeline for its eligibility groups to meet the deadline. Brown said it might even be possible for some counties to open eligibility as early as April 26.

The new April 19 deadline will only impact Oregon and a few other states. A majority of states already allow all residents over 16 to be vaccinated and only two — Oregon and Hawaii — had announced plans to lift the final barriers on May 1.

The Biden administration has pushed for ramping up vaccinations, saying at least a third of adults in the nation have received at least one dose of vaccine and three million shots were going into arms every day.

Brown and Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen have said the greatest impediment to widespread inoculation is supply of vaccine.

Over the past week, Oregon has questioned the federal allocation process state officials believe could be short-changing the state on vaccine allocations.

"My office will work closely with the White House to ensure Oregon receives our fair share of federal vaccine supplies, so we can continue with a fast, fair, and equitable vaccine distribution process," Brown said.

The White House announced Tuesday that 150 million shots have been administered since Biden took office on Jan. 20. He had promised to get 100 million shots into American's arms by his 100th day in office, April 30.

Oregon health officials said it had injected over 2 million doses of vaccine into the arms of Oregonians. Most of the shots are for the two-dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

The one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine has accounted for just over 50,000 shots in Oregon.

Several weeks of falling infection numbers had led the state to relaxing limits on eating at restaurants, holding public events, and limiting the number of customers allowed in businesses at one time.

The rise in numbers will lead to the return of some restrictions. Brown announced on Tuesday that the most extreme limits would only go into effect if more than 300 people with COVID-19 are hospitalized and the number increases 15 percent or more over a 7-day period.

As of Tuesday, Oregon hospitals reported 163 patients with COVID-19.

## I-84 drivers reminded about missing woman

The (La Grande) Observer

MEACHAM — Oregon State Police are reminding people in the area of the Interstate 84 work zone near Meacham to keep an eye out for anything that could lead to finding a woman who has been missing almost three months.

Deborah "Deb" Hendrichs of Ada County, Idaho, has been missing since Jan. 11. OSP Lt. Daniel D. Conner with the La Grande Area Command reported that an Oregon Department of Transportation worker was the last person to report seeing Hendrichs, whose 2012 black Toyota RAV 4 SUV ran out of fuel on eastbound I-84 near mile point 238.5.

"Members of the Oregon State Police responded to the scene within 20 minutes to find the vehicle unoccupied," according to state police.

Hendrichs is 56, stands 5-feet-6 and weighs 145 pounds. Multiple search efforts have not led to finding Hendrichs. Conner urged anyone who sees anything suspicious in the area to contact the Oregon State Police La Grande Area Command at 541-963-7175 and refer to case No. SP21-014895.



Hendrichs

## State House passes foreclosure moratorium bill

By Sara Cline  
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — A measure that would reinstate and extend Oregon's moratorium on foreclosures until Sept. 1 during the COVID-19 pandemic on Tuesday, April 6 passed the state's House of Representatives.

Unlike the bill that was passed by lawmakers in June 2020, the new legislation would not protect commercial property owners — those who own more than five properties or properties with more than four housing units. The moratorium would be retroactive back to Dec. 3, 2020, and could be extended until the end of 2021 by the governor.

The latest bill, which passed in the House 38-21,

moves to the state Senate.

"I assure you that Oregonians need this sort of protection. Without it, I fear that we face even more economic distress," said Rep. Paul Holvey, a Democrat representing Eugene. "More Oregonians will become homeless if this bill does not pass."

In March, more than 6% — or more than 65,000 Oregon homeowners — said they were not caught up on their mortgage payments, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent Household Pulse Survey.

Financial hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic have

only exacerbated the state's ongoing housing crisis and as a result has been a top priority for lawmakers, even prior to this legislative session.

In December, during a special legislative session, lawmakers extended Oregon's eviction moratorium through June 30, 2021.

## State GOP lawmaker faces recall effort over walkout

SALEM (AP) — Oregon state Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod faces a recall effort because he was among GOP lawmakers who allowed the chamber to reach a quorum last month while it debated whether to ban firearms in state buildings.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that Girod and five fellow Republicans were on hand March 25, ensuring the chamber had the minimum 20 members present required to take up

business. Republicans in the state Senate have previously skipped floor sessions en masse to thwart legislation favored by majority Democrats. The gun bill passed over GOP objections.

On Monday, April 5, a Molalla resident named LaVaedra Newton filed a prospective petition to bounce Girod from the Senate seat he's held since 2008. Newton and others say Girod abdicated his duty by not blocking the gun bill.





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