

Oregon News

Blazers will have sections for vaccinated fans at playoff game

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Thursday, May 27 tip-off of the playoff game between the Portland Trail Blazers and Denver Nuggets will be the first big test for Oregon's newly approved vaccinated sections at arenas, theaters and other businesses.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Governor and Oregon Health Authority as the first indoor sports venue in Oregon with vaccinated sections," Portland Trail Blazers President Chris McGowan said Monday. "Rip City has shown us such tremendous support throughout the season."

Gov. Kate Brown announced the policy early Monday, May 24, saying fans going to the Trail Blazers games at the Moda Center would be among the first to try out the new plan.

"When fans left the Moda Center last March, it was one of the first signs this pandemic was about to change our lives in ways we hadn't previously imagined," Brown said. "Vaccines are the key to our return to normal life."

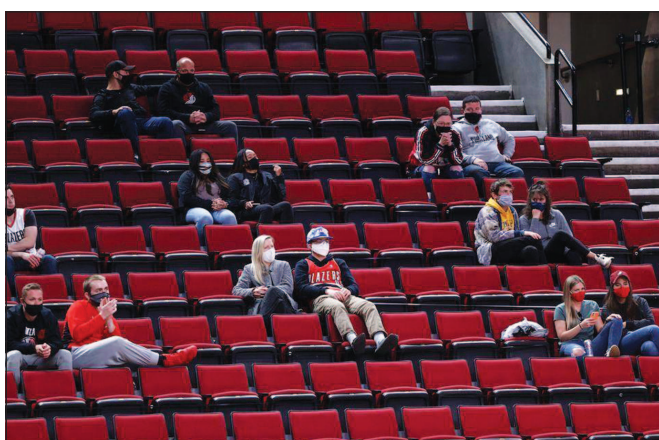
Venues, businesses and "faith institutions" can still opt to remain with their current, more restrictive health and safety measures, according to Brown spokesman Charles Boyle. But after verifying vaccination, those who are in the new special sections are not subject to mask, physical distancing or capacity limits that are still in place for other sections.

Multnomah County, home to the Moda Center, recently hit Brown's target of 65% vaccination rate among residents. The mark triggers a drop to the looser rules of the state's lower risk tier for COVID-19 infection.

The county's status allows venues to offer the new vaccination sections. Users of the vaccinated sections must have received both of the two-shot Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Two weeks must have passed since the last shot, the minimum time health officials believe is needed for full protection from the vaccine.

Unlike other parts of the country, Oregon requires proof of vaccination.

People in vaccinated sections will be required to show a CDC-issued vaccination



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

A handful of fans are in attendance as the Portland Trail Blazers face the Memphis Grizzlies at Moda Center on Sunday, April 25, 2021.

card, or a digital or printed copy. Non-vaccinated children up to age 15 can sit in vaccinated sections with their parent or guardian.

Oregon officials hope televised shots of fans in what recalls the old pre-pandemic playoff pandemonium will boost flagging inoculation rates.

Though the new policy will make a high-profile public debut in the NBA playoffs, the same rules can be followed to experience movies, theater, restaurants and other indoor activities in any county that meets the vaccination mark.

While those sitting in vaccination sections must be fully vaccinated, the plan is available in any county that has reached the state's target of having 65% of residents receiving at least one vaccine shot.

Deschutes, Washington, Lincoln, Hood River and Benton counties have reached the threshold, which allowed them to move into the lower risk level for COVID-19 infection despite having case rates that were higher than the maximum requirements for the least restrictive measures.

Multnomah joins the group after it submits the mandatory vaccine equity plan to reach underserved residents required of each county. Brown said the plan was imminent and the NBA said the Thursday game would offer the vaccination sections.

Boyle said OHA guidance on the new vaccinated sections spells out the definitions and requirements for individuals, groups and organizations. It covers those engaged in "commercial, industrial, or professional activities." Sectors include eating and drinking establishments, recreation and fitness centers, indoor

entertainment, retail stores, shopping centers and malls and personal services providers.

Those in vaccinated sections do not have to be counted in overall capacity limits.

"A theater would need to create a section for vaccinated individuals," Boyle said. "Individuals seated in the vaccinated area would not count toward the overall capacity limit. Individuals seated in an unvaccinated section would need to follow mask and physical distancing requirements and would count toward the overall capacity limit."

Other larger counties could soon join the lower risk group. Clackamas, Tillamook, Polk and Lane counties have passed the 60% mark on vaccination.

Curry, Gilliam, Harney, Lake, Morrow, Sherman, Union, Wallowa and Wasco counties are all rated as lower risk based on their actual infection rates.

State officials said Monday that Jackson, Marion, Douglas and Umatilla counties all needed to vaccinate more than 20,000 residents each to meet the 65% vaccination mark.

Besides the county-by-county method, Brown has said that the entire state — all 36 counties — will move into the lower risk category if 70% of residents age 16 and older have received one shot. As of Monday, 64% of those eligible under the guidelines had received at least one shot.

Large crowds sitting together without masks have attended sports events in other states that don't follow the COVID-19 restrictions required in Oregon. Political leaders have debated health agency warnings that such situations could turn into COVID-19 "superspreader"

events.

Oregon is not alone in creating special seating for vaccinated people at sporting, cultural and other events. Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington has announced that similar opportunities for those vaccinated against COVID-19 will be offered in the state.

But Inslee and other political leaders across the nation have relied on an "honor system" in which those who say they are vaccinated do not have to produce proof. Oregon requires businesses to ask for proof of vaccination in order for customers to go maskless.

Some political leaders, mostly Republicans, have gone the other direction and sought to bar government or businesses from inquiring about vaccination status or requiring proof, which conservative groups have branded as "vaccination passports." It's the latest political fight over COVID-19 policy pitting public health against privacy and personal choice that has included opposition to wearing masks and social distancing. Decisions to open public schools to in-person instruction and to require civic buildings be open to the public without any vaccination requirements have also split communities around the nation.

Oregon Republicans have criticized Brown's emergency orders that have given her wide latitude over public life in the name of preserving public health. The new policy has some in the GOP advocating for the honor system put in place by Inslee, a Democrat.

"Does Governor Brown believe that Washingtonians are more trust worthy than Oregonians?" Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, said in a statement Monday. "If not, why such a dramatically different standard and approach?"

Brown has pointed to Oregon's place near the bottom of the list of state infection rates and deaths as proof that the states' risk-and-rules based system has served residents well. Oregon has reported 198,972 positive COVID-19 cases and 2,624 deaths since the first reported cases of the pandemic reached Oregon in February 2020. Nationwide, there have been more than 33.14 million cases and 590,262 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

Man missing for more than two weeks found safe

ROSEBURG (AP) — A fisherman missing for more than two weeks in the wilderness of southwestern Oregon has been found alive.

The Douglas County Sheriff's office said search and rescue crews found 69-year-old Harry Burleigh in the Umpqua National Forest Sunday afternoon. KOIN reports Burleigh's wife reported him missing on Friday, May 7 after he didn't return from a fishing trip to Twin Lakes the day before.

Authorities had been combing the forest for Burleigh and found his vehicle May 8 at a trailhead. On Sunday, May 16, they found they found a makeshift shelter and a tackle box belonging to Burleigh.

A week later, at about 3 p.m. on Sunday, authorities said a search and rescue crew found another shelter southwest of the first shelter crews found the weekend before. The search crews called out for Burleigh and he responded. Burleigh was walking and complaining of minor pain, but he was in stable condition.

A helicopter transported him to a hospital for an evaluation.

"This was the outcome we all have been looking for in this case. It is because of our determined Search and Rescue Teams and the partnerships we have with other SAR teams from around the state, that Mr. Burleigh has been re-united with his family this evening," Sgt. Brad O'Dell, from the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, said.

Wolf that moved into California feared dead

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — An adventurous young gray wolf that crossed into California from Oregon has not been documented since early April, spurring speculation that he may be dead.

Wildlife officials who track OR-93 through his radio collar said he stopped emitting "pings" April 5 in San Luis Obispo County, which is roughly midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. But officials also have not picked up a "mortality signal" from the 2-year-old's collar, which indicates when a wolf has not moved for at least eight hours, the Los Angeles Times reported over the weekend.

The wolf's radio collar could be broken or malfunctioning due to dead batteries, said Jordan Traverso, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. He may be dead or running wild with a Central Coast pack that no one knew existed, she said.

"We're trying to keep hope alive," she told the news publication.

Biologists in Oregon fitted OR-93 with a GPS tracking collar in June, near the Portland area where he was born. He left the pack and crossed into California, padding south to an agricultural area near Fresno before heading west to the Central Coast. That the gray wolf made it so far was remarkable given that he had to cross three busy highways, wildlife experts said.

State biologists in Oregon and California said they plan to fly over his path with hopes of picking up his signal.

Millions of wolves thrived throughout North America until the 19th and 20th centuries, when they were eradicated by government. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the gray wolf from the federal endangered species list after determining the overall population was stable.

There are an estimated 6,000 wolves living in the lower 48 states of the U.S. Fewer than a dozen wolves live in Northern California.

Oregon House OKs election-day postmark for ballots

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon, the first state to conduct all elections by mail, would join the ranks of states accepting ballots postmarked by election day under a bill that has cleared the Oregon House.

House Bill 3291 was approved on a 39-21 vote Monday, May 24, and goes to the Senate.

The bill would align Oregon

with 17 states — including Washington, California and Nevada — that allow ballots to count if they are postmarked by election day. Four other states count ballots if they are postmarked the day before the election. Oregon is among the states that have required ballots to be in the hands of county elections offices by the close of election day.

Under the bill, ballots would have to arrive in county

elections offices no later than seven days after the election if they are to count. States that allow election-day postmarks range widely from three to 20 days.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, a Democrat from Corvallis and the

bill's floor manager, said about 150 voters in Marion County cast ballots in last year's general election, but they did not count because they were received after election day.

He said the concept of election-day postmarks has

been on the table for two decades, going back to when Republicans were the majority party in the House.

Rep. Greg Smith, a Republican from Heppner who then was in his first term, voted for it in 2001 and now. The only

other Republican who voted for it Monday was Rep. Ron Noble of McMinnville. The other 21 Republicans voted against it.

The vote in the House Rules Committee was along party lines.

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2021 EASTERN OREGON PHOTO CONTEST

Official Rules:

Photo Contest open now and closes at 11:59 pm Sunday, June 20, 2021.

Staff will choose the top 10. The public can vote online for People's Choice from 12:01 am Monday, June 21 through 11:59 pm Thursday, June 30.

Digital or scanned photos only, uploaded to the online platform. No physical copies.

Only photographers from Oregon may participate.

The contest subject matter is wide open but we're looking for images that capture life in Eastern Oregon.

Entrants may crop, tone, adjust saturation and make minor enhancements, but may not add or remove objects within the frame, or doctor images such that the final product doesn't represent what's actually before the camera.

The winners will appear in the July 8th edition of Go Magazine; the top 25 will appear online.

Gift cards to a restaurant of your choice will be awarded for first, second and third place.

Submit all photos online at: bakercityherald.com/photocontest