

Survey: Brown not trusted in advising COVID-19 vaccination

■ Researchers suggest someone else promote vaccinations to Oregonians

By Hillary Bonud
The Oregonian

Gov. Kate Brown should stop urging Oregonians to get vaccinated against COVID-19 because she is the “least trusted” figure for unvaccinated individuals and could be undercutting the state’s efforts to reach herd immunity, according to new survey results released Tuesday, July 13.

In recommendations for how the state could further boost vaccinations, researchers at the University of Oregon’s Institute for Policy Research and Engagement were blunt: “less Gov. Brown.”

“Gov. Brown is a polarizing figure for unvaccinated individuals,” wrote Benjamin Clark and Robert Parker, respectively the co-executive director and the director of strategy and technical solutions at the institute. “We would recommend that (the governor) defer being the primary messenger to unvaccinated Oregonians.”

Brown made Oregon’s COVID-19 response the focal point of her governorship over the last year, and she has urged people to get shots in weekly pandemic-focused online media briefings. In May, she announced the state would offer a \$1 million lottery and other prizes for vaccinated Oregonians, and last week, Brown held a photo op with the winner.

The researchers top recommendation: Health officials should offer \$100 cash to encourage vaccinations.

The survey, which included 686 Oregonians and took place from late May through the end of June, found that unvaccinated Oregonians’ own doctors are the most trusted messengers, followed by family and friends.

Clark and Parker recommended that state and local government agencies do more to help medical providers do outreach to patients on vaccines, and they also suggested those agencies produce guides



The Oregonian/File Photo

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown receives the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at a rural health clinic in early March 2021.

“Gov. Brown is a polarizing figure for unvaccinated individuals. We would recommend that (the governor) defer being the primary messenger to unvaccinated Oregonians.

— Benjamin Clark, co-executive director, and Robert Parker, director of strategy and technical solutions, University of Oregon Institute for Policy Research and Engagement

for the general public on “how to talk to your unvaccinated friends and family about getting vaccinated.”

The governor is a Democrat and the University of Oregon researchers noted that 41% of Republican survey respondents said they were unvaccinated and 48% of nonaffiliated voters who answered the survey said they were unvaccinated. In contrast, only 13% of Democrats who participated in the survey said they were still unvaccinated.

Brown declined through a spokesperson to respond to the findings. The spokesperson, deputy communications director Charles Boyle, indicated the governor will not change her messaging or other work regarding CO-

VID-19 vaccinations.

Five of the researchers’ other recommendations also focused on getting information to a wary or misinformed public, including that vaccines are free and that unvaccinated people make up the bulk of those still getting sick and hospitalized with COVID-19.

They also suggested health agencies apply research on effective messaging when trying to educate the public and enhance those efforts by going to door-to-door — resource-intensive work that they said could be the only option for additional conversions.

But the university’s first recommendation was far less nuanced. Instead of winning hearts and minds with data,

the researchers suggested health officials offer \$100 cash.

Such an incentive, their research found, could convince one in five of those who say they won’t get vaccinated, and one in three who say they might.

“This is the most accessible and most direct path to Yes for these individuals,” they wrote.

Unvaccinated survey respondents said a \$100 bill or cash card would be twice as persuasive as a \$1 million lottery to get them to get their shot.

Clark and Parker said the state could better tailor its financial incentives to get the most bang for the buck. They noted Oregon is starting to pay \$100 incentives to state workers vaccinated by the end of July, although approximately 80% of public workers in the state are already vaccinated. In contrast, less than 50% of self-employed Oregonians are vaccinated, and nearly 70% of employees at family-owned businesses remain unvaccinated, they wrote.

COVID

Continued from Page A1

“We clearly still need to be aware that the virus continues to be active in our community, and variants are spreading that are even more contagious,” said Bennett, who has served as the county’s incident commander throughout the pandemic. “Unfortunately, this isn’t over. I encourage everyone to be mindful of protecting themselves and others, especially those with underlying health risks.”

The man who died July 13 is the youngest among the county’s COVID-19 deaths. Another 59-year-old man from Baker County died on Feb. 2. He also had underlying medical conditions.

The 14 others were all older than 70. Nancy Staten, director of the Baker

County Health Department, said in early July that she’s concerned the county could be vulnerable to future COVID-19 outbreaks due to the county’s relatively low vaccination rate.

As of Friday, July 16, seven of Oregon’s 35 other counties had a vaccination rate lower than Baker County’s rate of 45.6% of residents 18 and older.

Those counties are: Lake (36.2%), Malheur (37.3%), Gilliam (42.0%), Grant (42.1%), Umatilla (42.2%), Harney (42.7%), and Morrow (44.4%).

The statewide average is 67.8% among residents 18 and older.

The average number of vaccinations given in Baker County has plummeted since a series of clinics at Baker High School in February, March and early April.

The county administered 3,034 doses

— 26% of its total doses — on just five days during that period.

The county hasn’t given more than 96 doses in any day since June 11. The biggest daily number since then was 39, on June 17, and the county’s seven-day running average of doses administered has been declining during July, from 20 per day on July 1 to eight on July 14.

The daily total of vaccinations administered in the county has ranged during July from a high of 33 on July 2, to a single dose (of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which unlike the others requires only one shot), on July 11.

Baker County’s highest vaccination rates are among residents 80 and older (67.8%, compared with 77.6% statewide) and ages 70-79 (64.7%, statewide 83.5%).

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald

Multiple factors combine during record heat wave

By Seth Borenstein
AP Science Writer

The American West is baking, burning and drying in intertwined extreme weather. Four sets of numbers explain how bad it is now, while several others explain why it got this bad.

The West is going through “the trifecta of an epically dry year followed by incredible heat the last two months and now we have fires,” said University of California Merced climate and fire scientist John Abatzoglou. “It is a story of cascading impacts.”

And one of climate change, the data shows.

RECORD HEAT

In the past 30 days, the country has set 585 all-time heat records, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Of those, 349 are for daily high temperatures and 236 are the warmest overnight low temperatures, which are vital for people to recover from deadly heat waves.

And this doesn’t include Death Valley hitting 130 degrees preliminarily. If this is confirmed, it would be the hottest temperature on Earth in decades — and several meteorologists say it would be the hottest reliable temperature recorded because many don’t trust the accuracy of two hotter records.

A different part of Death Valley likely set the world record on July 11 for hottest 24-hour period by averaging the daily high and overnight low to come up with 118.1, according to meteorologist Maximiliano Herrera, who tracks weather extremes.

The average daily high temperature for the entire area from the Rockies and westward in June was 85.7 degrees, which beat the old record by 1.3 degrees, according to NOAA.

SEVERE DROUGHT

Nearly 60% of the U.S. West is considered in exceptional or extreme drought, the two highest categories, according to the University of Nebraska’s Drought Monitor. That’s the highest percentage in the 20 years the drought monitor has been keeping track. Less than 1% of the West is not in drought or considered abnormally dry, also a record.

LOW SOIL MOISTURE

How much moisture in the soil is key because normally part of the sun’s energy is used to evaporate moisture in the soil and plants. Also, when the soil and plants are dry, areas burn much more often and hotter in wildfires and the available water supply shrinks for places like California, a “true indicator of just how parched things are,” Abatzoglou said.

Both NOAA and NASA show soil moisture levels down to some of the lowest recorded levels for much of the West. Most of California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, Utah and Idaho are drier than in 99% of other years.

WILDFIRES BURNING

There are 68 active large fires burning, consuming 1,038,003 acres of land, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. With those fires and ones in Canada, there is “one large area of smoke over much of the U.S. and Canada,” NOAA said Tuesday.

So far this year, wildfires have burned 2.2 million acres, which is less than the 10-year average for this time of year. But that may change because dry plants are at extra high risk of burning in much of the West as shown in what experts call fire’s energy release component.

HOW WE GOT HERE

“The heat wave story cannot be viewed as an isolated extreme event, but rather part of a longer story of climate change with more related, widespread and varying impacts,” said climate scientist Jennifer Francis of the Woodwell Climate Research Center on Cape Cod.

SUMMERS GETTING HOTTER

From 1991 to 2020, summers in the Rockies and westward have on average become 2.7 degrees warmer. The West is warming faster than the rest of the United States and the globe.

See **Heat Wave**/Page A6

PRISON

Continued from Page A1

Sprague also faced several other charges in Baker County, including first-degree assault, second-degree assault, menacing and coercion, that could potentially have resulted in a longer prison term had he been convicted on all the charges.

But Baxter said he was not confident he would have had cooperation from all the victims in those charges had Sprague gone to trial, as some are his relatives or friends.

Baxter said he was satisfied with the sentence on the plea agreement, which includes 90 months for the first-degree robbery conviction. That’s a Measure 11 offense in Oregon, meaning Sprague will serve the entire

sentence without a chance for reduction based on good behavior.

Sprague admitted threatening a woman with a shotgun while taking her cellphone on May 15 in Baker City.

He was also accused of hitting the woman in the face with the butt of the shotgun, but the second-degree assault charge was dismissed as part of the plea agreement.

Sprague was sentenced to one year on the second charge to which he pleaded guilty — assaulting a public safety officer. Sprague admitted spraying Baker City Police officer Koby Essex in the face with bear spray on May 14 while Essex was talking to Sprague about a report that Sprague had assaulted a woman.

Baxter said Sprague could potentially earn a slight

reduction in the one-year sentence.

Sprague, who was on probation for one year after being convicted of menacing in Baker City on Jan. 8, 2021, will likely serve about 104 or 105 months in total on the Baker County charges, including time based on violating terms of his probation, Baxter said.

“I thought it was a fair outcome,” Baxter said, for what he described as Sprague’s “crime spree.”

The Baker City Police Department issued a public notice on May 18 alerting residents about Sprague, noting that he was a suspect in multiple crimes and had not been arrested.

The notice described Sprague, who has no fixed address, as “armed and dangerous.” He was arrested two days later in La Grande.



BY APPOINTMENT ONLY!

Call Baker County Health Department to Schedule @ 541-523-8211

2021 WELLNESS EVENT

Ages 12 to 21 years old

YOUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT!

- Primary Care Providers
- Mental Health Providers
- Physical Therapy
- Public Health Specialist, Immunizations and Relationship Safety
- Yearly Preventative Checkups
- Sports Physicals Available

“Take care of your body it’s the only place you have to live.”

~ Jim Rohn

July 27, 28, & 29th
5:30 to 7:30 pm

—

Adolescents under 15 must be accompanied by a parent

—

Drawings every night

—

Bring Insurance cards if available *

—

*NOTE: We cannot access your insurance cards with St. Luke’s

St. Luke’s Clinic
3950 17th St.
Baker City OR 97814

Call Baker Health Department to schedule an appointment
541-523-8211

Registration packets available at The Baker County Health Dept. and <https://www.bakercounty.org/health/registration.html>