

Oregon health care workers to get COVID vaccine or be tested

Gov. Kate Brown announced requirement Wednesday

By Sara Cline

The Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — Oregon health care workers will be required to be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing, Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday, Aug. 4.

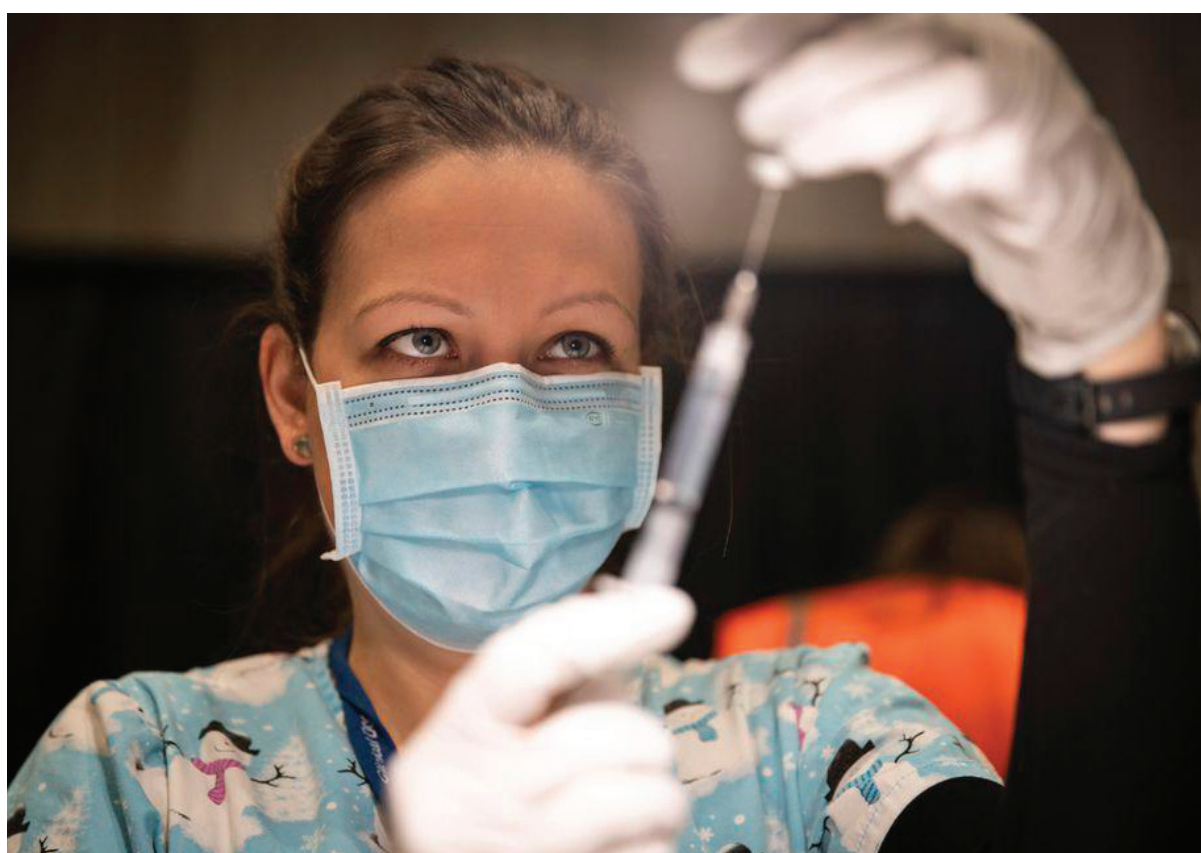
Officials say the new rule will apply beginning Sept. 30 — giving time for employers to prepare for implementation and for unvaccinated health care workers to become fully vaccinated.

“The more contagious delta variant has changed everything. This new safety measure is necessary to stop delta from causing severe illness among our first line of defense: our doctors, nurses, medical students, and frontline health care workers,” Brown said.

Brown directed the Oregon Health Authority to issue the new rule which applies broadly to personnel in health care settings who have direct or indirect contact with patients or infectious materials. The rule requires weekly COVID-19 testing for personnel and can be waived with proof of vaccination.

A state law enacted in 1989 prohibits employers from independently mandating vaccines for certain limited categories of workers, including health care workers. But, a spokesperson from the governor’s office says the new rule does not conflict with the law.

“This is not a requirement for vaccination, rather, the OHA ad-



Brooke Herbert/The Oregonian, File

Kelli Newcom, R. N., preps vials of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to be administered to teachers and educators at The Oregon Convention Center in Portland in January.

ministrative rule gives health care personnel a choice between weekly testing or providing proof of vaccination,” said Charles Boyle, Brown’s deputy communications director.

In addition, Brown says she intends to work with stakeholders and lawmakers to address the existing law during the February 2022 legislative session.

As COVID-19 surges across the state, leading health organizations — including the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems — have been pressing state leaders

to open the door for health care organizations to enact vaccination mandates.

On Monday, officials at Kaiser Permanente, one of Oregon’s largest private health systems, announced that health care workers, along with the rest of its staff, would be required to get vaccinated. The only exemptions are for medical or religious reasons.

“Making vaccination mandatory is the most effective way we can protect our people, our patients, and the communities we serve,” CEO

Greg A. Adams said in an online statement.

Kaiser serves approximately 12.5 million members in eight states and the District of Columbia. So far nearly 78% of the 216,000 employees have been vaccinated and 95% of Permanente Medical Group’s 23,000 physicians.

In a statement sent to Oregon Public Broadcasting, Kaiser’s Director of Integrated Communications Michael G. Foley acknowledged Oregon’s 1989 law, but said “because of the growing seriousness of the

current situation, the new risks and increased cases caused by the delta variant, as well as the priority to keep patients and employees safe, we will act to apply the vaccination requirement in the Northwest region.”

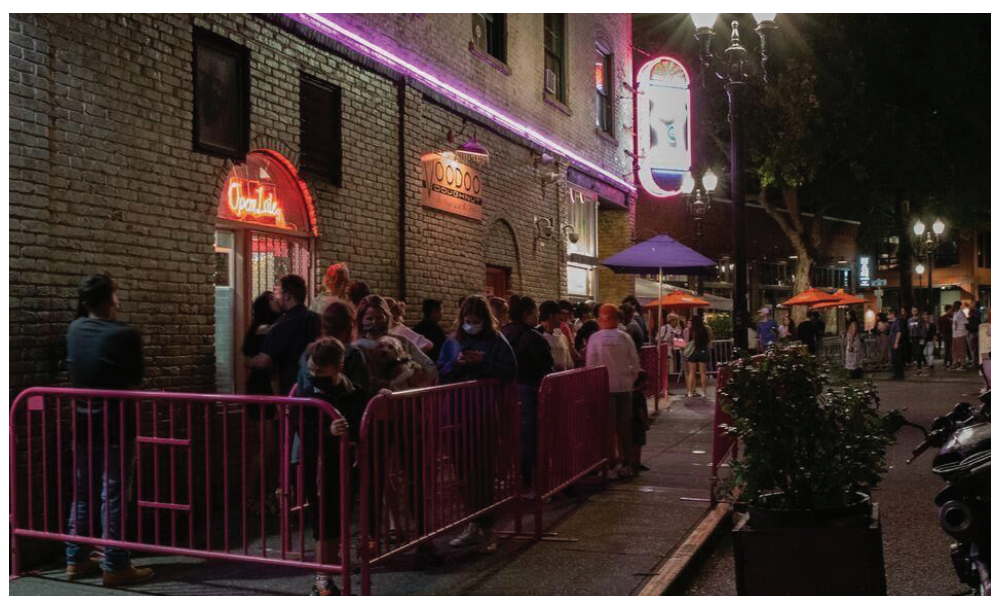
Kaiser is working with state health officials and the governor to “support vaccination to the fullest extent permitted by law and any future guidance,” Foley said.

On Tuesday, Oregon reported 1,575 coronavirus cases — the state’s highest daily case count since January. In addition, hospital beds are filling up quickly with 379 people hospitalized on Tuesday due to COVID-19. Some hospital officials, including those at Oregon Health & Science University, said they are postponing some surgeries that are not urgent.

Health officials are urging residents to get vaccinated. Currently, around 29% of Oregon adults remain unvaccinated.

Brown said that she is looking at additional health and safety options to protect Oregonians, including vaccination and testing policies for state workers.

“As we have throughout this pandemic, we are learning to adapt to the new reality the delta variant has created,” Brown said. “I am encouraging Oregon cities, counties, businesses, and employers to think creatively, and to implement measures such as paid time off for vaccination, and incentives for employees, in addition to instituting masking requirements and other health and safety measures in the workplace.”



Mark Graves/The Oregonian

Bars, clubs and food carts in downtown Portland were packed with people July 23 under an increased police presence.

Coalition of Portland bars requiring proof of vaccination

PORTLAND (AP) — A coalition of bars in Portland, Oregon has banded together to require proof of COVID-19 vaccination at the door as the delta variant spreads throughout the state.

The coalition of 15 bars is being organized by Teardrop Cocktail Lounge owner Daniel Shoemaker, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

He expects to add as many as 30 more establishments in the coming days as

they seek to protect customers and staff by allowing only vaccinated guests inside.

Each bar in the coalition will create its own rules around what constitutes proof, but generally a vaccine card or photo of it should suffice. Most will continue to offer outdoor seats to all.

The new coalition was formed after similar groups in San Francisco in Seattle drew hundreds of West Coast bars last week. Some have

faced a social media backlash, but Shoemaker expects his in-person guests to be largely supportive. The rule been in effect at Teardrop’s adjacent lounge, Crybaby, through the summer.

Shoemaker and others are also watching as New York City prepares to begin enforcing its vaccine mandate for indoor activities at restaurants, gyms and theaters.

Fired school leader says different values behind ouster

ALBANY (AP) — An ex-Oregon schools leader says the people who ousted her last month never spoke to her, and the district’s work on equity — which she championed — is now languishing.

Board members at the Greater Albany Public Schools District fired Superintendent Melissa Goff soon after new members took over, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

Goff was terminated without cause, a point Goff said confirmed she hadn’t done anything wrong. She said she was removed for having different values, such as ensuring equity was integrated into teaching.

Board chair Eric Aguinaga, however, said in an emailed statement that Goff was fired because she had become a polarizing figure in the Albany community.

The conflict is not the only example of recent friction between elected school board members and administrators.

The Newberg School Board has announced plans to repeal state policies aimed at equity including a policy which among other things, bans hate symbols such as nooses and swastikas. Those plans have drawn opposition from the state legislature’s BIPOC caucus and House Majority Leader Barbara Smith-Warner, D-Portland.

Aguinaga also disagrees with Goff’s allegation that Albany has been shirking commitments to help historically marginalized students. The chair noted that Goff’s interim replacement, longtime school leader Rob Saxton, is deeply committed to equity work.

Goff argues that the process to bring in new

administrators — including Saxton — is evidence that the district is less committed to helping students of color and other student groups the district hasn’t historically served well. Goff said four recently filled positions went to white men on a fast timeline.

“All of those positions not having been posted so that publicly people around the state or the nation could apply for them create a lack of access for people of color, create a lack of access for bilingual people,” Goff argued.

The four positions are interim superintendent, chief of staff, interim executive director of operations, and an assistant principal position. Chief of staff Rich Sipe confirmed that all four positions were filled quickly by four people who identify as white males through appointments after the board hired Saxton.

Medford school custodian who planned attack arrested

MEDFORD (AP) — A custodian at a high school in Medford, Oregon, faces felony charges after police say he took “significant steps” towards planning a “mass casualty event” — including one at South Medford High School, where he worked.

The Mail Tribune reports Kristopher Wayne Clay, 24, is in the Jackson County Jail on charges surrounding a cache of guns, ammunition and handwritten manifestos found at three locations in Jackson County.

Authorities say Clay obtained multiple rifles two years after courts prohibited him from owning firearms. Clay began working as a custodian for the school starting in February until an investigation that began July 20, when authorities say he came into the Medford police lobby, asked to talk to an officer and confessed to having homicidal thoughts and plans to carry out an attack.

The officer placed him under a mental health hold,

and transported Clay to Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center’s behavioral health unit.

Police place a person under a mental health hold when the individual poses a danger to themselves or others, according to Medford police Lt. Mike Budreau. From there they typically admit a person to the hospital’s behavioral health ward and leave the case to mental health experts.

“In this particular case, we believe that he’d taken some pretty significant steps to carry out his plan,” Budreau said.

Budreau called it “unfortunate” that Clay had to be fully prosecuted, because Clay prevented himself from carrying out his plans by contacting police.

“Had he not come forward, who knows what could have happened?” Budreau said.

Clay made his initial appearance in Jackson



Clay

County Circuit Court Thursday on felony charges of attempted second-degree murder, attempted second-degree assault, unlawful use of a weapon, and misdemeanor counts of unlawfully possessing a firearm and tampering with physical evidence accusing him of damaging or destroying a journal he kept at the hospital.

Judge Laura Cromwell ordered no early release unless Clay posts a 10% bond on bail set at \$2 million. Efforts to reach an attorney for Clay weren’t immediately successful.

Medford School District spokesperson Natalie Hurd said 45 high school students are currently attending the school’s “Panther Camp” summer program catching up on credits.

The school district terminated Clay’s employment, according to Hurd, and the school district is working closely with Medford police School Resource Officers.

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