

Brown mandates vaccine for school, health workers

By GARY WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

Facing a sharp surge in COVID-19 infections that threatens to swamp Oregon hospitals, Gov. Kate Brown ordered a double dose of mandatory vaccination mandates on Thursday, Aug. 19.

All K-12 educators, school staff and volunteers must be vaccinated no later than Oct. 18.

"COVID-19 poses a threat to our kids, and our kids need to be protected and they need to be in school," Brown said.

A second mandate with the same deadline would apply to doctors, nurses, emergency medical teams and other health care workers.

The mandates have a deadline far beyond the projected Sept. 3 peak of the current spike in cases.

Brown said there were no current plans for earlier actions, such as restoring pandemic restrictions on businesses and gatherings, or curbing big events upcoming events such as the Oregon State Fair, the Pendleton Round-Up or Oregon Ducks football games.

"Everything is on the table," Brown said, using a frequently invoked phrase to leave open options if the pandemic trends shift again.

State health officials know that they have an explosion of COVID-19 cases with a likelihood that the problem will only grow over the next two weeks.

Daily infections have exploded in the past six weeks,



Cathy Cheney/Portland Business Journal pool, file/Tribune Content Agency, File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

going from under 150 in early July to a record 2,971 cases reported on Thursday. The state is now averaging 2,025 cases per day.

The Oregon Health Authority has reported that hospitals are nearly full, with 93% of staffed adult hospital beds in Oregon occupied and 94% of staffed adult ICU beds across the state are full.

The Oregon Health & Science University COVID-19 forecast for Aug. 18 said the pace of increases will continue until Labor Day weekend and is likely to leave the state 500 hospital beds short of demand.

"The fifth wave of the pandemic in Oregon remains much more severe than previous surges," said Peter Graven, a top OHSU data scientist.

On Wednesday, the percentage of COVID-19 tests that were positive was 13.8%, a rate that indicates exponential growth of infections. A rate of 5% is considered the top end to manage impacts on public health. The original version of COVID-19 reached a maximum rate last year of one person infecting three others. The delta variant is spreading at a rate of one person infecting eight others.

The OHSU forecast, which is updated about once a week, now projects COVID-19 hospitalizations to rise from the current 838 patients to about 1,075 by Sept. 3.

The spike won't completely recede to levels seen at the beginning of August until late October at the earliest, accord-

ing to the OHSU forecast.

OHA Director Pat Allen painted a dire picture of the hospital system straining under the flood of unvaccinated people who have become infected with the delta variant.

"Our health care system is on the verge of collapse in parts of the state," Allen said.

The quarter of the state's population who remain unvaccinated offer themselves "as a target to a virus that has killed 600,000 Americans," Allen said.

Brown said she knew the vaccination requirements would generate blowback from workers who didn't want to be vaccinated, just as her earlier switch from voluntary to mandated mask wearing by school children had generated a wave

of opposition.

But many of those decisions were made in July, when COVID-19 cases were about 12 times lower than today.

Without the mask and vaccination mandates, Brown said it would be difficult in particular to keep students in the classroom.

"That's why I'm willing to take the heat for this decision," Brown said.

The deadline for both the health and education groups to be vaccinated is Oct. 18, or six weeks after full approval of the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

Brown is also requiring all employees of the state's executive branch under her control to be vaccinated.

There are health and religious exemptions the state workers can apply for, but the third option, Brown said, "is termination."

The mandates come as voluntary vaccination in Oregon is "flat" according to OHSU and rising slightly according to OHA. That mirrors a national trend of slowing inoculation, with the CDC reporting about 771,000 doses per day are being used today, a more than 75% drop from the 3.38 million on April 13.

OHA also reported:

- 12,741 new daily cases of COVID-19 during the week of Monday, Aug. 9, through Sunday, Aug. 15. That's up 53% over the previous week.

- 546 new COVID-19 hospitalizations, up from 224 the previous week. It marked

the fifth consecutive week of increases.

- 46 reported COVID-19 related deaths, up from 40 reported the previous week. Though widespread vaccination of older residents and others most susceptible to severe illness has curbed the percentage of those killed by the virus, the current spike is spreading so rapidly that all indicators, including deaths, are on the rise.

Brown's orders bring Oregon in line with California and Washington policies. The Portland Public Schools had earlier mandated vaccinations for teachers and staff.

Brown said the state is taking several steps to shore-up the response to the medical crisis. Actions include sending National Guard troops to 20 hospitals in the state to support staff experiencing a torrent of new cases.

Requests for help from other states and federal agencies have been made, including asking the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a fully staffed field hospital.

The state is also hiring nursing teams and private emergency medical technicians to supplement the exhausted personnel in the state.

The National Guard units will include nurses, staff for temporary decompression units to free up bed space, and speeding the discharge of patients who no longer require hospital-level care so that new patients can be assigned to open beds.

MENTOR

Continued from Page A1

Palmer, 17, concedes that he too struggled with the transition from elementary school to middle school.

"I didn't do very well with school," Palmer said.

Myers Jensen, 18, admits, too, that the foursome had a tendency to take hijinks more seriously than academics.

"We were some troublemakers, especially back then," he said.

And so one day in May 2017, just before the four boys finished eighth grade and prepared to move on to Baker High School, Howerton brought them all together.

He made a pledge to them, one that perhaps sounded a trifle silly but about which Howerton was as serious as he could be.

The terms of the deal were simple.

If all four boys exerted themselves during high school — if they stayed out of trouble and kept their grades up and graduated on time — then Howerton wouldn't cut his hair for the whole four years.

He wouldn't get so much as a trim until each boy had his diploma.

They lined up for a photograph that day, all five of them, in front of the middle school gym.

They wanted something tangible that would help them to remember.

To remember the pact.

To remember Howerton's close-cropped hair.

It would, perhaps, have been an easy thing to forget.

Four years is a long time.

And few four-year periods bring such monumental changes as the four years of high school.

But Howerton didn't offer the deal on a whim.

And whether or not the boys might have forgotten that day, and that photograph, Howerton was committed to following through.

"When they got to high school I would check in on them," he said. "I saw them at football games. I'd make sure they were holding up their end of the bargain."

Howerton said he spoke with the boys' parents and

teachers occasionally.

Rasmussen said Howerton's persistence was gratifying.

"He really helped us," Rasmussen said. "He's the reason I passed science. He was always there for us. He encouraged us to put in actual effort. He really showed that he wanted us to succeed."

Palmer agreed.

"I don't have a dad role model, and it was really nice to have Jimmy always check up on me," Palmer said.

Myers Jensen said he didn't appreciate the depth of Howerton's commitment initially, but as the years passed he began to understand more clearly.

During his junior year, when he was working at Behlen Mfg. Co.'s livestock equipment plant in Baker City, Myers Jensen said he had a conversation with Howerton.

Myers Jensen said that as he looked at Howerton's shoulder-length hair, he realized that his former coach had not taken his pledge lightly.

"That's a pretty big commitment," Myers Jensen said.

This spring, as all four boys prepared to graduate from BHS, Howerton got in touch with them. He wanted to replicate that photograph from 2017. He figured that was a fitting finale to their deal, and a tribute to the boys' triumphs.

Howerton said that although he has strived to be a mentor for every child he coaches or teaches — he's a teacher's aid — his relationship with Myers Jensen, Delarosa, Rasmussen and Palmer will always be a special one.

"This group — I really wanted to help them," he said. "They were all close friends. They liked to hunt and fish, the things I enjoy as well."

Howerton also hoped to have each boy clip a lock of his hair, but their hectic schedules made that impossible.

Howerton was busy himself — his granddaughter was born on May 2, and his grandson on July 14.

He actually waited until after his grandson was born

to finally have his hair shorn. That was on July 16.

The group was, however, able to gather just before the four friends graduated from BHS, for another photo in front of the middle school gym, this one showing how the boys — and their mentor's hair — had grown in the preceding four years.

Palmer said he has remained close friends with the three others throughout high school, and he's confident they will always share a unique bond due to their pact with a coach who thought it vastly more important to help them succeed in life than to learn how to play football.

"We were like a little family," Palmer said. "I think I'll remember it for the rest of my life."

Myers Jensen feels fortunate that Howerton focused on this particular foursome, boys who perhaps more than most needed the very sort of mentoring that Howerton offered.

"For him to have seen something in this group of kids, and then to follow through, it says a lot about Jim," Myers Jensen said.

"He brought us even closer together."

Editor's note: Carlos Delarosa couldn't be reached for an interview prior to this story.

COUNCILOR

Continued from Page A1

"Due to worsening health issues I am no longer able to put in the time required to serve to the degree the City and the public deserve," Perry wrote. "It has been a

pleasure to be a part of the governing process of the city. I wish you well."

Mayor Kerry McQuisten said she understands Perry's position.

"I'm sorry to see her go, but after talking with her, I understand her reasoning and wish her the best,"

McQuisten said. "She has put in a lot of work for the community."

Perry's term continues through the end of 2022.

Per the city charter, the remaining councilors will appoint Perry's replacement, who will serve the remainder of her term.

VISITORS

Continued from Page A1

contract on Sept. 30, and for commissioners to potentially sign the contract on Oct. 6.

Bennett said the county's initial goal was to sign a new contract by Aug. 31.

He said the county's attorney, Kim Mosier, recommended commissioners not extend the contract with the Chamber. Commissioners did so in 2020 and twice in early 2021.

The concern, Bennett said, was that by repeatedly extending the contract, the county could "be faced with some litigation."

When the county released a Request for Proposals for visitor services in the fall of 2019, it received two proposals — one from the Chamber, and one from the nonprofit corporation that owns Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

The current contract is for about \$77,000 per year. The

money comes from the local tax that guests pay at motels, bed and breakfasts, vacation rental homes and other types of lodging.

Both the county Economic Development Committee and the committee that oversees the lodging tax, which advise county commissioners, endorsed the Anthony Lakes proposal.

But in February 2020 commissioners postponed awarding the contract, instead extending the current contract with the Chamber. In November 2020 commissioners decided to restart the process, after the county's attorney determined there were potential conflicts of interest.

Peter Johnson, general manager for Anthony Lakes, has in multiple emails to county commissioners urged them to award a new contract. The county's bylaws state that the visitor services contract should be awarded every six years, which is the timeframe the county was

trying to meet with the 2019 Request for Proposals.

Last winter an attorney representing the county, Andrew Martin, exchanged letters with Rebecca Knapp, an Enterprise attorney representing Anthony Lakes.

Martin wrote in a Feb. 16, 2021, letter to Knapp that "This does not mean that the current Visitors Center will simply continue to operate indefinitely. The lack of direction and definition of what is expected and needed on Baker County is equally problematic for the current Visitors Center. Although I do not believe that your client has any actionable grounds to pursue a lawsuit, your points about the delay and frustration for your client are well taken and I have shared them with the Commissioners."

Both Cutler and Johnson said their respective organizations intend to submit a proposal to the county prior to the Sept. 17 deadline.

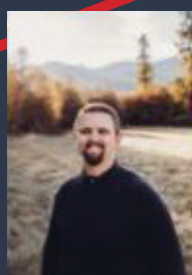
OPEN HOUSE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22ND, 2021

12293 Bulger Flat Lane,
Haines, OR
1:00PM-3:00PM



Hosted by: Mitch Grove
light refreshment provides



MITCH GROVE
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