

EDITORIAL

Omicron and 2022

Will the omicron variant do for the first quarter of 2022 what delta did for the late summer and early fall of 2021?

The infectiousness of omicron, which outpaces delta, is certainly troubling. In just a couple weeks the new variant was responsible for a majority of symptomatic cases in some areas of the U.S.

But there are also multiple reasons to believe that we are better equipped, including in Baker County, to deal with this latest threat in a pandemic that is approaching its second anniversary. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown needs to consider these factors, which could render unnecessary any return to the severe restrictions, on schools, businesses and other parts of society, that prevailed earlier in the pandemic.

Most notably, many more people are protected by vaccines now than when the delta variant began to run rampant in July. And although vaccination isn't as effective against omicron as against earlier variants, vaccines still provide significant protection from severe illness in vaccinated people who have breakthrough infections. The same seems to be the case for people who have been infected with a previous variant and have a level of immunity as a result.

When the delta variant began to spread rapidly in Baker County starting in late July, about 54% of residents 50 or older — who are vastly more likely to become severely ill or to die — had had at least one vaccine dose. Today, about 62% of those residents are vaccinated

— and 38% of residents 65 and older, and 20% of those 50 to 64, have had a booster dose, which experts say strengthens the defense against omicron.

In addition, since July more than 1,000 infections have been tallied in Baker County. Those residents — and in particular those who were previously or subsequently vaccinated — also should be better protected than they were prior to being infected.

Health officials also say that although the data are limited, there is reason to believe that omicron in general causes less severe illness than delta. Although Dr. Jacob Lemieux, who monitors variants for a research group led by Harvard Medical School, noted that “I don't think we can bet the farm on that.”

But even if infection rates



rise rapidly in Oregon — a recent projection from Oregon Health & Science University predicts two to three times as many COVID-19 patients will be hospitalized due to omicron as during the peak of the delta surge — there are also promising new antiviral drugs that could help to thwart the worst effects of omicron. These, combined with proven treatments such as monoclonal antibody therapy, should give hospitals more

effective tools to treat patients.

Concerns about omicron are understandable. But decisions about imposing restrictions on society should be based not on the number of infections, but on the severity. So far, Brown has emphasized, wisely, the value of vaccines, treatments and testing rather than reflexively issuing mandates.

— Jayson Jacoby,  
Baker City Herald editor

Your views

I don't want Baker County associated with extremist organization

I find it disturbing that our Baker County Commissioners are considering a resolution to join the Constitutional Sheriffs and Police Officers Association (CSPOA) and become a “constitutional county.” Richard Mack, founder of the CSPOA, was a longtime board member of the Oath Keepers, an extremist far right organization, many of whose members were participants in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. Two days after the riot the CSPOA issued a statement exonerating Trump and pushing the debunked claim that Antifa was responsible for the violence. This is not a movement I want my county to be associated with.

Mary Sue Rightmire  
Baker City

Maskless audience at Baker County Commission meeting is not acceptable

On Tuesday, Dec. 15, the Baker County Commissioners hosted a completely packed crowd of about 40 anti-vaxxers with a dozen more in the lobby. No masks, no social distancing.

What the hell were the commissioners thinking?

This is completely unacceptable behavior, without any regard for the possibility that on the Commission's watch and under its sponsorship someone might get

infected and end up with a life-threatening COVID infection or transfer COVID to some third party who might end up dying.

The newspaper reported that just recently two more Baker County residents died of COVID.

A hospital administrator told me that at times Saint Alphonsus Hospital, which does not have the necessary equipment to treat severely COVID-infected patients, has had to transfer such patients to another hospital. But with the present surge of COVID patients in Oregon and the nation, there are no hospitals in our region with available beds. Due to the fast-spreading new African COVID variant, beds are even less likely to be available for our Baker County residents.

Unfortunately our County Commissioners were too intimidated by the anti-vaxxers to act responsibly with the good of the whole community in mind. Instead they just caved in to a tiny fringe group with a political anti-Governor Brown agenda.

And what a slap in the face to Baker County Health Department (BCHD) personnel, who are doing their very best to get people vaccinated by holding a three-day vaccination clinic at the Fairgrounds last week in Baker City, and several such clinics around the county. I understand that during the clinic in Baker they vaccinated about 330 of our residents.

Kudos to BCHD and those who showed up to be vaccinated. Boos to the commissioners, whose actions Dec. 15 were illegal and completely irresponsible.

I spoke with a commissioner after the meeting. He admitted that the Commission should have limited the number of persons in the Commission chambers to social distancing and required masks. A sign on the Courthouse door says no admittance without wearing a mask.

One more comment. The newspaper reported that at the Dec. 15 meeting the three commissioners were not wearing masks. Commissioner hearings are recorded. No masks are required since their comments and votes on motions must be audible to the audience and the recorder. There is adequate social distancing between commissioners, commission personnel, and the audience.

Gary Dielman  
Baker City

Baker County Commissioners waste time listening to fringe group

I am in awe of the ridiculousness our beautiful paradise has descended into. Not only do we have to suffer with a dysfunctional council led by the most inept mayor conceivable but now even our county commission has fallen off the deep end. They are now inviting fringe groups of conspiracy embracing, anti-science anar-

chists to special “no masks required” super spreader events, right here in your little town. All the while our local sicknesses and deaths from COVID keep climbing. What a great message to send to your constituents? What about our Health Dept. and their extraordinary efforts to get our citizens vaccinated, overworked and underappreciated, let's just slap them in the face!

The reason for this embarrassment you might ask? Another meaningless resolution about rights that contains no more legal bearing than what already exists. Nothing more than chest thumping posturing by the “me, me, me” crowd. Why would our county commissioners waste their time and energy on complete nonsense? This is such a tiny fringe of disgruntled. Why not host some QAnon group while we're at it? Is this some sort of “good old boys” collaboration? Just trying to wrap my head around the reasons, or excuses, for such irresponsibility.

I wonder if these are the same people I encounter in those rare cases that I leave the safety of my home. You know the ones, children disguised as adults ... no mask, no respect, because no one gonna tell them what to do, as they buckle their seatbelt, stop at the light, pay their “mandatory” auto insurance, property taxes. I have a special name for the maskless, the unvaccinated, the deniers — “the walking dead.”

Mike Meyer  
Baker City

The lunacy of a top 10 list of the ‘worst’ candies

When I read the word “worst” near the word “candy,” with only one other word separating the adjective from the noun, I had to look more closely.

I am but a puppet in the hands of the clever online marketing masters.

I am powerless to keep my eyes from straying to phrases such as “interactive candy map 2021” and “WORST Christmas candy.”

My fascination with reading about confections is exceeded only by my appetite for them.

(And frankly it's not close, as a series of dentists in my wake, their hands possibly palsied from the incessant drilling, can attest.)

Outfits such as CandyStore.com obviously understand that their digital audience includes weak-willed people like me — people as easily entranced by certain words as a famished dog can be led along by a hunk of juicy steak dangled beneath its keen nose.

But I'm intrigued not only by references to sweets.

The CandyStore.com email, which landed in my inbox a few weeks ago, is also an example of what's become ubiquitous in our age of constant information onslaughts.

This online purveyor of empty calories has compiled a survey which purports to compare the confectionery preferences of residents across our (artificially) fruited plains and (artificially dyed) purple mountains majesty.

I get at least a few similar emails every week.

These surveys, which cover a gamut of topics — recent examples include favorite board games and Christmas carols — are entertaining despite their lack of statistical legitimacy.

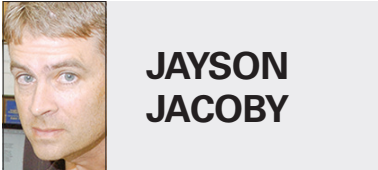
It's hardly life-changing to know that, based on the responses from 11,000 CandyStore.com customers, that Oregon's favorite Christmas candy is Reese's peanut butter cup minis, while California's is peppermint bark.

But this sort of thing makes for a pleasant diversion of a few minutes from more pressing subjects.

It's certainly not something to take seriously.

After all, no rational person believes that there are so many bad candies that a top 10 list (or, rather, bottom 10) can be justified.

Other than the exceedingly rare product that includes either walnuts or pecans — which are about as appropriate in candy as a Big



JAYSON JACOBY

Mac is at a PETA convention — I struggle to think of any candy that I could fairly brand as bad.

To my tastebuds, candy is instead a spectrum ranging from acceptably tasty to downright spectacular.

Yet CandyStore.com insists on offering what it proclaims “The Definitive Ranking of Worst Christmas Holiday Candies.”

It seems to me unnecessary to address each of these scurrilous claims.

No. 4, for instance, Lifesavers Story Books, hardly need an obscure editor to defend their honor. Lifesavers are so perfectly rendered that it's not been necessary to tinker with the recipe over so many decades.

And Peeps at No. 6?

I'll concede that these delightfully chewy morsels are more evocative of Easter than of Christmas. But this in no way diminishes the sheer ecstasy of letting a properly aged Peep slowly dissolve in your mouth, the crystallized sugar coat-

ing forming a sweet blanket over your tongue (you need to expose Peeps to the air for a few days to transform their initial flaccid state to the ideal firmness).

But a couple of entries struck me as especially egregious.

The first, coming in at No. 9, is the chocolate orange.

This might be the most inexplicable member of the bottom 10.

Never mind the nearly universal affinity for chocolate, surely the greatest culinary achievement that relies on a bean.

What I particularly like about the chocolate orange is that it combines two satisfying activities — smashing something and eating chocolate.

Lastly, at No. 2 (and last year's absolute worst Christmas candy, according to the survey) is the chocolate-covered cherry cordial.

Chocolate-covered cherries are not my favorite Christmas candy. I doubt they'd even make my top 10, unless I was compiling my list while I was eating one.

But I will always have a special fondness for them because chocolate-covered cherries are my dad Alan's favorite candy.

And not just at Christmas. My dad is easy to shop for, no

matter the season or occasion.

If you can't think of anything else to give him, you can buy a box of cherry cordials and feel certain that he will be, if not necessarily surprised, then at least pleased by the gift.

But even when I set aside my bias for chocolate-covered cherries on behalf of my father, it seems to me passing strange that they would be among the most-disliked candies.

I understand that their texture is a trifle unusual — there is something a bit unsettling about that initial squirt of syrup when you crunch down, a glut of liquid that you don't get with most other foods.

But otherwise, cordials are quite decadent even by the standards of candy, a rich mixture of the smooth sweetness of milk chocolate and the mild tartness of the cherry.

Touting these candies as the runner up on the “worst” list seems to me as sensible as replacing the peanuts in a Snickers with walnuts.

Which would be worthy at a minimum of a federal investigation, if not a special prosecutor.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.