

COVID

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The three-day total of 61 cases is the most in that period since 65 cases from Sept. 15-17.

For the first six days of January, Baker County reported 81 cases, almost 80% of the total of 106 cases during December.

Oregon set statewide daily records for total cases on four straight days, including 7,615 on Jan. 6.

But Bennett and Staten both pointed out that statewide, the number of people with COVID who are being treated in hospitals has risen at a much slower pace.

As of Jan. 6, there were 588 people with COVID being treated in hospitals, about half the September 2021 peak.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) doesn't have current statistics, at the county level, on the number of residents admitted to a hospital for treatment of COVID-19.

In a Jan. 6 email to the Herald, Laura Huggins, Foundation, Marketing and Communications coordinator at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in

Baker City, said there hasn't been "an uptick in omicron in our hospital."

"To me, hospitalization is the real number we always need to keep our eye on," Bennett said. "Because it impacts other medical emergencies and situations too."

Bennett said that in addition to the growing evidence that omicron is less likely to cause severe illness, he's encouraged because, compared with the significant surge in cases and hospitalizations in December 2020 and January 2021, vaccination rates are much higher.

Hardly any Baker County residents had been vaccinated at that time, as the vaccines became available only late in 2020.

Today, about 55.1% of Baker County residents 18 and older have had at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the OHA.

That's the fifth-lowest rate among Oregon's 36 counties.

Bennett acknowledged that omicron is more capable of infecting fully vaccinated people, in what are known as breakthrough cases, as well as reinfecting people who previously contracted a different variant.

But he noted that evidence

shows that breakthrough and reinfection cases tend to cause less severe symptoms, and in some cases asymptomatic infections.

"That could be the determining factor in whether we have a big increase in hospitalizations," Bennett said.

The OHA's weekly breakthrough case report listed 12 breakthrough cases, out of 29 total cases, in Baker County for the week Dec. 26 through Jan. 1. The breakthrough case rate of 41% is the highest ever in Baker County.

Staten said she expects the number of breakthrough cases will increase this week along with the overall total.

More home testing

Staten said this week's increase in cases has been spurred in part by a big jump in the number of residents calling the Health Department after taking a home test that had a positive result.

She said about 11 of the 69 cases reported this week were from home tests.

In the past, the county has received just a few calls about positive home tests.

Staten said residents are not required to report the results of

home tests, but they can do so if they so choose.

Staten said those cases are deemed "presumptive," the same as a person who hasn't had a confirmed lab test but is identified, through contact tracing, as a close contact with someone who did test positive.

Case counts include both those confirmed by lab tests and presumptive cases.

Vaccination clinic planned

The Health Department will have a drive-thru vaccination clinic on Thursday, Jan. 13 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Baker County Fairgrounds, 2600 East St. (north of Campbell Street).

Staten noted that booster shots are now available for everyone 12 and older who had their second dose at least five months ago.

According to OHA data, 41% of Baker County residents 65 and older have had a booster dose of vaccine.

The booster dose rate for other age groups in the county:

- 50 to 64: 22.5%
- 20 to 49: 10.7%
- 18 & 19: 8.2%
- 12 to 17: 1.3%

Rhonda Culley

July 2, 1956 - December 31, 2021

Rhonda Culley, 65, of Baker City, died Friday, December 31, 2021 at home surrounded by her family. A celebration of life will be held at a later date (TBA).

Rhonda was born in Baker City, Oregon, July 2, 1956. She was raised and educated in Baker City and graduated from Baker High School in 1974.

Rhonda met Timothy Culley through a friend. They were married on May 4, 1979.

Rhonda worked for the Department of Human Services for 42 years and was proud of her various promotions throughout the years.

She enjoyed spending time in the mountains and with her family, quilting with friends and keeping score at baseball and softball games. Her favorite color was blue and she loved watching the tulips bloom in the spring.

Highlights in her life included the births of her children and grandchildren. She will be remembered for her contagious smile and positive attitude.

Rhonda was preceded in death by her parents, Dallas and Beverly (White) Dean.

She is survived by her husband of 42 years Timothy Culley; children, Makayla (Randy) Mooney of John Day, Tyler Culley of Baker City; grandchildren Jazlynn, Noah and Kinley; many nieces and nephews.

For those who would like to make a memorial donation in honor of Rhonda the family suggests Heart n' Home Hospice through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home and Cremation Services, PO BOX 543, Halfway, Oregon, 97834. Online condolences can be shared at tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.



Owens

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Oregon has been under a state of emergency since March 8, 2020, when Gov. Kate Brown declared her intention to take extraordinary measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Brown has extended the state of emergency several times since then.

Under Owens' proposal, known as Legislative Concept No. 49 until it is assigned a bill number, the governor, when making a declaration of emergency, must specify each county where the emergency exists and list reasons why local jurisdictions should be under a state of emergency.

According to the proposed legislation, the declarations cannot exceed increments of 30 days. After 30 days, the decision to extend a state of emergency would go to a local governing body for a vote. County and city governing bodies could then create a hybrid of emergency restrictions if they choose to do so regarding such measures as masking, school closures and vaccine requirements, Owens explained in an interview.

Additionally, the legislative concept states that a governor may not retaliate against a county whose governing body has determined not to fully continue a declaration of emergency beyond the initial 30 days of the order. Owens said this includes threats to pull state funding, fines against local businesses and other types of state sanctions.

Under current Oregon law, the governor must review and reevaluate emergency orders every 60 days to determine whether those orders should be continued, modified or rescinded.

Local control emerged as a significant issue for Grant County residents in August after Gov. Kate Brown reversed course on her June 30 executive order handing over public health decisions to counties amid a resurgence of COVID-19.

While the swiftly spreading delta variant sent COVID case counts soaring, Brown issued a barrage of new executive orders mandating masks

in K-12 schools, inside state buildings and, finally, in all public indoor spaces in the state. Those actions drew the ire of Grant County leaders.

Parents asked for the county court's support in getting decision-making back to the districts and out of the hands of the state.

County Judge Scott Myers told parents that the county does not have the power to take back local control of its school districts from the state. However, the county signed a letter from the Eastern Oregon Counties Association asking for local control of school districts.

"Some people might be mistaken in thinking that the county has power beyond a voice," Myers said. "We don't have the power to make those things happen."

In a Dec. 21 press release, Brown extended the COVID-19 state of emergency through June, saying scientists believed the state was just weeks away from a new wave of hospitalizations due to an anticipated surge of the rapidly spreading omicron variant.

Oregon Health and Science University lead data scientist Dr. Peter Graven predicted that the omicron variant could surpass the delta variant in the number of cases due to its extreme transmissibility.

Brown's office said in the press release that the emergency declaration provides the necessary framework to access resources in response to the pandemic, which includes the deployment of medical providers to hospitals, flexibility around professional health licensing, and access to federal disaster relief funds.

"As Oregon prepares for what could be our worst surge in hospitalizations during this pandemic, I know that this is not the beginning of the new year any of us had hoped for," Brown said.

Constitutional framework

Jim Moore, a professor of political science at Pacific University in Forest Grove, said Oregon's Constitution defines the governor's emergency powers and what types of "catastrophic disasters" can allow them to be used.

The Constitution puts acts of terrorism at the top of the list,

along with earthquakes, floods and public health emergencies.

Moore said that the catastrophes spelled out within the Constitution are assumed to be relatively short-lived.

"The problem we have right now is that it's going on long term," Moore said. "And so Republicans have decided that is an abuse of emergency power."

Indeed, Moore said, everyone has a partisan take on the debate.

"Republicans say, 'We need to change it.' Why? Because they don't like what Kate Brown is doing. Democrats are saying, 'No, we don't need to change it' because they do like what Kate Brown's doing."

Since the pandemic's beginning, it's become evident that the federal government has minimal power in this situation and that the ability to deal with the pandemic rests with the states, Moore said.

That limitation on federal power, he said, is by design as part of the U.S. Constitution. For instance, he said, Oregon was able to pass an assisted suicide law because states have the right and the frontline duty to deal with public health issues.

Almost from the pandemic's beginning, the question of how to respond to the coronavirus has been a hot-button political issue.

That said, Owens' proposed legislation is something of a departure from recently passed legislation in GOP strongholds. For instance, conservative legislators in more than half of U.S. states, spurred on by voters angry about lockdowns and mask mandates, have stripped local officials of the power to protect the public against infectious diseases.

Moore said that the conservative ethos has long been that more governing power should be local. However, legislation passed in red states like Florida runs counter to what has traditionally been the GOP ideology.

Thus, he said, this means one's political ideology shapes one's views on emergency powers.

For his part, Owens said his motives are not politically driven.

"Honestly, it's not about partisanship," Owens said. "I

by no means think the governor should not have the ability to declare an emergency declaration for 30 days, maybe even longer," Owens said. "That's reasonable."

Dora L. Fisher

September 1, 1922 - December 31, 2021

Dora L. Fisher 99, a resident of Baker City, OR, died Friday, December 31, 2021 at Settlers Park, Baker City, OR.

Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Thursday, January 6, 2022, at 11:00 am in St. Francis de Sales Cathedral, Baker City, OR. Reverend, Suresh Telagani of St. Francis will celebrate the Mass. Interment will be in Willamette National Cemetery, Portland, OR where she will be laid to rest beside her husband.

Dora Lucille (Hemmers) Fisher was born on September 1st, 1922 in her family home in Pleasant Home, Oregon, to parents Henry B. and Stella (Sinclair) Hemmers. Mrs. Fisher passed away on December 31st, 2021 in Baker City, Oregon, at the age of 99.

Mrs. Fisher grew up in Pleasant Home, Oregon, a small community near Gresham, Oregon. Mr. and Mrs. Hemmers had seven children, Marguerite, Fred, Elton, May Bell, Otto, Bertha, Dora and Stella. Dora graduated from Gresham High School in 1940.

On March 7, 1946, she married John A. Fisher in Gresham and traveled to one of her favorite places, the Oregon Coast, for their honeymoon. Beach trips were always a fond memory and she cultivated her love for the Oregon Coast to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Dora and John had four children Barbara (John Day, OR), Patty (Baker City, OR), Mary (Milton Freewater, OR) and Don (Boring, OR). Her best and most rewarding job was that of being a homemaker and a parent. When her husband passed away in 1970, she held several different jobs and learned how to drive a car!

Mrs. Fisher lived in Pleasant Home and Boring, Oregon, on the west side of the state until 2001, when she relocated to Baker City, Oregon. While in Baker City, she was able to be closer to her daughters and many of her grand-

children and later, great grandchildren. While she was a practicing catholic prior to the move to Baker City, she became involved in St. Francis de Sales Cathedral and was a part of the Altar Society within the parish. She enjoyed the view of "her" mountains (the Elkhorn Mountains) during her stay in Baker City and was still able to take a number of vacations to the beach as well.

It was commonly known that she had an affinity for the game show "Wheel of Fortune" and would most often solve the puzzles before any of the contestants on the show could figure the puzzle out. While she was happy when the contestants would win, she was also known to "scold" them when they got it wrong and it was (obviously) clear to her what the answer was. Jigsaw puzzles were another activity that Dora enjoyed. There was rarely, if ever, a time when there wasn't a completed puzzle or one in progress on her table. This continued well after her 99th birthday.

On December 31, 2021, she decided that it was time to meet her husband to ring in the New Year.

While it is a sad day for the family, it is comforting to know she was able to celebrate it with her Johnny. Another, well known 99 year old accompanied Dora to the Pearly Gates, so we all know she was in good company on that trip! That would have been a sight to see when Dora and Betty arrived.

Mrs. Fisher was preceded in death by her parents, siblings, her husband and a grandson, Nathan Kelly. She is survived by her children, 13 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Shrine Hospital for Children, this may be done through the Coles Tribute Center 1950 Place St. Baker City, OR. If one wishes to light a candle in memory of Dora, please visit www.colestribute-center.com.



27 December 2021

Dear Fellow Veteran:

I am running for the overwhelming honor of serving as your next Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Oregon Guard.

Oregon desperately needs effective, solution-oriented leadership. As your next Governor, I will restore Constitutional order on Day 1 because the first duty of Government is maintaining order and safeguarding the innocent. As the next Commander-in-Chief of Oregon's Guard, I will never treat you like a prop.

I was trained that leading means you sleep last, eat last, and put yourself last.

I lead with a servant's heart because serving America is in my blood. I went to Marine Corps boot camp in 1979. My time in the Corps taught me how to fight – and win – as a team. After I graduated from medical school, I was proud to serve as a Navy physician. My dad was an Army soldier and Japanese POW in World War II. He met my German mother while serving in the Army Air Corps during the Berlin Airlift. I grew up right outside March Air Force Base, and my first job was bagging groceries at the Commissary.

I learned from the start that a team couldn't win unless every member of the team plays team ball.

Many of you know that I fought my heart out in 2016 to save Oregon from Kate Brown. We were outnumbered and overrun. We lost that battle, but we will not lose this war for the future of Oregon—a war for what you sacrificed to defend.

Today, Oregon is at a crossroads. You can barely recognize the great State we call home. She is bleeding out, and she won't survive unless you administer buddy aid.

Oregonians will follow where you lead. To win, I need your endorsement. I need you to sign up with my campaign to keep you informed of events, rallies, and targets of opportunity. I need you to contribute. But most of all, I need you to lead by organizing every Veteran in this great State to help me take it back.

The decisive battle is about to be joined, and I am asking you to join thousands of fellow patriots in Veterans for Bud Pierce. By rallying to my guidon, you can save Oregon.

Semper fi,

Dr. Bud Pierce
Sgt, USMCR/LTCDR, USNR

MEET OREGON'S NEXT GOVERNOR DR. BUD PIERCE

COME MEET AND TALK WITH BUD AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS ON
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12TH

Ontario
8:00 AM
at the Plaza Inn
Restaurant in
Ontario

John Day
11:00 AM
at Ogilvie Field
in John Day

Baker City
6:00 PM
at the Baker
County Conference
& Event Center

RSVP TODAY TO INFO@BUDPIERCE.ORG



Please join us, I would like to meet you and hear your ideas about Oregon's future!"

—BUD PIERCE

Want to be on our mailing list? Send an email to info@budpierce.org and we will sign you up!