

LOCAL, STATE & REGION

COVID-19 | Vaccination campaign

State scrambles after 42 vaccine doses wasted

BY FEDOR ZARKHIN
The Oregonian

Two Portland hospital systems threw out more than three dozen coronavirus vaccine doses even as Oregon's top health official said his agency knew of no wasted vaccines.

Oregon Health & Science University lost 15 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses after one vial broke and two were mixed improperly, a hospital spokeswoman said. Legacy Health lost 27 doses when it couldn't find health care workers to take surplus vaccine in the short time before it expires, a Legacy spokesman said.

And yet, the director of the Oregon Health Authority appeared unaware that any doses had been lost in Oregon.

"We have not received any reports of spoilage from sites that are administering the vaccine, and that is something that we keep track of," Director Patrick Allen said at a news conference Tuesday. "Vaccines are being handled and administered in a proper and timely way."

The agency said it learned of the wasted doses from The Oregonian and then confirmed them with OHSU

and Legacy, despite Legacy saying it had previously reported the information to the state as required.

"We will follow up and make sure this wastage is properly documented," health authority spokesman Jonathan Modie said in an email.

It's unclear if other doses in Oregon have been wasted.

Oregon's vaccination effort

The wasted doses reflect just 0.07% of the 55,000 vaccines administered in Oregon so far. And the lost doses have been more than made up for by the unexpected extra doses health care workers have found in overfilled Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine vials.

But the disconnect between hospitals' reported data and health officials' statements points to yet more evidence of growing pains as the state faces criticism for its slow vaccination pace and outlines plans to soon vaccinate 12,000 people a day.

The Oregon Health Authority said it is to be expected that some vaccine will spoil in the process of such a massive vaccination project. Nothing yet points to vaccines being wasted due to negligence, the agency said.



Mark Graves/The Oregonian file

Ansu Drammeh, a registered nurse who has been on the front line fighting coronavirus for the last 10 months, was the first person to receive the vaccine at Oregon Health & Science University on Dec. 16.

"We believe that our health system partners are managing their vaccine responsibly and doing everything that they can to minimize waste," Modie said. "We have seen no evidence that vaccine is being handled in anything less than a responsible manner."

Legacy lost doses because Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine sometimes has an extra one or two doses per vial,

spokesman Brian Terrett said. That meant that Legacy workers would get through the list of people scheduled to get a shot before the vials they had unpacked ran out.

But because the doses have an expiration date measured in hours, not days, doses are lost if someone can't be found to take a vaccine. Finding such a person can be a challenge, Terrett said,

because people need to be able to take time off if they experience side effects.

"Having more doses than expected has impacted our ability to schedule staff for their vaccine effectively," Terrett said.

Tracking spoilage

The hospital system has reported its lost doses to a statewide vaccine tracking system, Terrett said.

OHSU pharmacists lost 15 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, said spokeswoman Tamara Hargens-Bradley. One vial containing five doses broke, Hargens-Bradley said, and another two vials containing a combined 10 doses were mixed incorrectly.

Hargens-Bradley did not respond when asked whether the hospital had reported the lost doses to the state.

It's possible that OHSU and Legacy reported the wasted doses to a statewide vaccine tracking system, as required, but that the health authority wasn't aware of it.

"We'll check (the state's vaccine tracking system) and follow up as needed with these providers, and with any providers that have reported such losses," Modie said.

218 inmates have COVID-19 at one Washington prison

Associated Press

Washington state officials say more than 200 inmates at Larch Corrections Center northeast of Vancouver have tested positive for COVID-19.

The Washington State Department of Corrections said Larch Correction Center had six incarcerated individuals that tested positive for COVID-19. In the bulletin released Monday, the prison reported

218 inmates had tested positive.

The prison, located in Yacolt, Washington, has a capacity of 480 inmates.

State officials said all inmates who tested positive are being housed together to reduce the spread of the virus, which is standard protocol.

COVID-19 outbreaks have also been reported in prisons in Ore-

PORTLAND

1 dead in Legionnaires' disease outbreak

Associated Press

PORTLAND — An outbreak of Legionnaires' disease at a North Portland apartment complex has killed one person and sickened three others, county health officials said.

Multnomah County health officials said Tuesday they told more than 100 residents of Rosemont Court on Dekum Street to leave after residents contracted pneumonia.

The health department said experts linked the outbreak Monday to the apartment's water system. County officials are working to clean the building's plumbing system and remove any remaining traces of Legionella, the bacteria that causes the disease.

The health department is working with Northwest Hous-

ing Alternatives, which owns Rosemont Court, to find other places for residents to stay. Multnomah County spokeswoman Julie Sullivan-Springhetti said residents were staying in Portland-area hotels, per a contract with the county, while health officials investigate the outbreak source.

People can contract the disease when they breathe in very small droplets of water with the bacteria. Most exposed to it don't get sick but some people can contract severe pneumonia. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, muscle aches and headache. More serious symptoms include cough and chest pain. The disease is not spread person to person.

As of Monday, 20 residents had left the building and officials said more were leaving Tuesday.

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