

COVID-19

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OHA reports cases are averaging 392 per day, while hospitalizations are up and the percentage of tests that come back positive is 3.7%. That is still below the 5% level above which OHA has said growth of the virus becomes exponential.

The rise comes despite the arrival of three vaccines that can inoculate people from the virus. But only 18% of Oregonians are currently completely vaccinated, slightly higher than the national average.

OHA had hoped to have at least one shot of vaccine given to every Oregonian over age 16 who wanted one by late May. Due to vaccine delivery issues, OHA is now looking at early June to reach the goal.

The state is getting an average of about 30,000 new shots of vaccine into people's arms per day, though mostly the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines that require two shots spaced out over about a month.

OHA had been hoping for a surge of new one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccines. But the company announced this week that a subcontractor in Baltimore had improperly mixed ingredients, ruining as many as 15 million doses set to go out to states over the next few weeks.

Johnson & Johnson vaccines that are currently being given are not from this batch and are safe and effective, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported earlier this week.

Oregon has over 35,000 doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccine available now, but it will receive between 200,000 and 300,000 fewer doses than expected in coming weeks.

The inoculation campaign comes amid concern of the growth of new, more contagious and likely more lethal versions of COVID-19.

Researchers have found that those who are inoculated will most likely be spared severe illness or death compared to the unvaccinated.

"This is a race between the vaccines and the variants," Brown said.

Washington will become the latest state to offer vaccines



"The goal of Oregon's vaccination strategy is to make sure we are doing this fast and doing this fairly," Gov. Kate Brown said.

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

to everyone age 16 and above earlier than the federal May 1 deadline. Gov. Jay Inslee has announced all eligibility restrictions will be lifted April 15.

Brown said Oregon would stay with its current plans that would not lift restrictions until May 1, though some counties could petition to open vaccination to more people in the last week of April.

Oregon was fighting to make vaccination equitable across economic and ethnic groups, Brown said.

"The goal of Oregon's vaccination strategy is to make sure we are doing this fast and doing this fairly," she said.

Brown announced that effective immediately, people with several additional underlying medical conditions would be added to the advanced eligibility list, including smokers. A full list will be released by OHA.

The state will also allow workers who are currently eligible for the vaccine — such as farmworkers — to bring all adults in their household to be vaccinated at the same time.

OHA is also working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to create pop-up and mobile vaccination centers in rural parts of the state, including Morrow County.

Not on OHA's agenda is any loosening of business restrictions.

OHA officials said they would be sticking with the four-tiered county risk level system, with the next changes announced April 6 to go into effect April 9.

Among the issues that OHA is facing in its goal to maximize inoculations is what OHA Director Pat Allen called "a softening of demand" for vaccine among targeted senior groups, particularly in southwestern Oregon and portions of rural East Oregon.

Sidelinger said evidence is be-

ginning to show an unfortunate relaxed attitude toward mask wearing and social distancing as the warmer spring weather brings people together.

"Mask use is going down, while travel is going up," Sidelinger said.

A report on Friday by the New York Times of travel volume at airports included statistics showing Portland International Airport passenger traffic is up 43% compared to February 2020. Air traffic in Eugene is up 60%, while Redmond is up 62% and Medford is up 63%.

A CDC report this week said that air travelers who wear their masks throughout a flight do not have an increased level of exposure to the virus.

Nationwide, just under 3 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine are being administered daily.

The pandemic has caused 129.97 million cases and over 2.83 million deaths worldwide, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. The United States has had over 30.57 million cases and 553,691 deaths, the center says.

More information on the COVID-19 situation in Oregon and how to find vaccinations can be found at getvaccinated.oregon.gov.

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Wirkkala

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Jurors were also instructed on two instances when use of deadly force is authorized — when one fears for his or her life or the life of another person, and to stop a burglary. The defense argued both instances apply.

Among other witnesses, the defense called character witnesses who testified to Wirkkala's supposed easygoing and peaceful nature. Experts in body mechanics spent hours parsing the "sooting" marks on Ryder's body left by the shotgun blast, and whether his left arm could have been covering himself defensively, as the state suggests, or moving to attack Wirkkala, as the defendant claimed.

On Friday, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Hoffmeyer gave the state's closing argument.

Technical issues have so far bedeviled the proceedings, which are held with social distancing in mind in a refitted exposition barn. Hoffmeyer's statement was paused by the judge several times for issues with poor audibility and microphone feedback.

"Fun times at the fairgrounds," she said, resuming her closing argument after a delay.

Throughout the trial, prosecutors have referred to the victim as "David," whereas the defense has called him by his first and last name — "David Ryder" — as well as other words, like, "predator," "intruder" and "psychopath."



Dean Guernsey/Bulletin
Luke Wirkkala is seen March 19 during his retrial.

"We have a situation here where there are two admittedly very drunk men and perhaps you will know based on your common sense and experience that very drunk people often make decisions that they regret," Hoffmeyer said.

Both Wirkkala and Ryder were in heterosexual relationships at the time of the shooting, and Wirkkala has said he's always been straight. But DNA evidence suggests the two had sexual contact the night in question: Wirkkala's saliva was found on Ryder's penis.

Wirkkala's explanation is that after passing out on his living room couch, he awoke to Ryder sexually assaulting him. They struggled violently and Wirkkala went to his room, retrieved his shotgun and shot Ryder only after he refused to leave and charged at Wirkkala, he testified.

DNA evidence also shows skin from Wirkkala's neck under Ryder's fingernails, which suggests there was in fact a struggle between the two men.

In her closing, Hoffmeyer suggested another scenario.

"It's possible it was a consensual encounter, (Wirkkala) stopped it and felt ashamed," she said. "This smacks of a retaliation murder, if you want to believe what he told you,"

Thad Betz delivered the defense's closing argument and characterized the shooting as a "desperate reaction to a violent threat."

"It was ultimately a reasonable use of force," he said.

Once again, video footage of Wirkkala's time in police custody factored heavily in the case. The footage from after the shooting shows Wirkkala quizzing a pair of Bend Police officers about their lives, like whether they skied or snowboarded and why they moved to Bend. At several points, he breaks into country songs.

"He's visibly intoxicated, I would submit," Hoffmeyer told jurors. "It's surreal."

Betz said the footage shows a man in shock experiencing the "full gamut" of human emotions and was avoiding the event in his head.

"Cast aside your assumptions and presumptions about male sexual assault — they might not behave like you'd imagine a victim would. They don't necessarily curl up into a ball," he said.

The jury, which has been winnowed to seven men and five women, will resume its deliberation at 9 a.m. Monday. All 12 jurors must agree on a guilty verdict, though only 10 votes are needed for finding of not guilty.

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County

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Keeping the counties from bouncing around on the risk categories is important for the community and businesses, churches and other places where people gather in order to avoid the yo-yo of opening and closing, said Katy Brooks, Bend Chamber of Commerce CEO.

"Many businesses in town are dreading moving backward to more restrictions," Brooks said. "This can literally mean whether their businesses survive. And it's possible that after spring break this may be the case."

Heider said for counties with populations larger than 30,000 people, the state looks at the positivity rate and the case rate per 100,000.

For the most current week data are available, March 14-27, the positivity rate for Deschutes County was 2.5%, higher than the previous time period of March 7-20 when it was 1.9%. The rate is above the Feb. 28-March 13 rate of 2.2%, according to Oregon Health Authority data.

For the same time periods, Oregon as a whole had a positive rate of 3.3% for the week of March 14-27 and 3.3% for the week of March 7-20.

The case rate in Deschutes County was 99.5 cases per 100,000 population for the week of March 14-27, accord-

ing to Oregon Health Authority data.

To be in the moderate risk category, counties with more than 30,000 people need to have a rate less than a 100 cases per 100,000 people over a 14-day period, have fewer than 45 cases over a 14-day period and have a test positivity rate less than 8% over a two-week period.

Deschutes County moved from the high risk to the moderate risk category on March 12, which enabled the county to have indoor dining at 50% capacity or a maximum of 100 people, whichever is smaller. Oregon's risk framework calls for four categories based on COVID-19 spread: extreme risk, high risk, moderate risk, and lower risk.

The current increase in the number of cases has been caused by travel-related cases, outbreaks and close contact, said Emerson. In addition, cases are spreading from gatherings and social events, she said.

Last year, there was a spike in cases after spring break and the Easter holiday, Emerson said.

"Every single day, we make great progress in vaccinating Oregonians," Gov. Kate Brown said in a press conference Friday. "Your actions and your smart choices have saved lives. Let's keep it up these last few miles."

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CENTRAL OREGON WORSHIP DIRECTORY

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