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BRIEFING

Officials looking into 3rd virus dose

Federal health officials signaled Thursday they're hunting ways to quickly learn if a third COVID-19 vaccine dose might better protect organ transplant recipients and other patients with weak immune systems.

While the vaccines are strongly effective in most people, many Americans with immune-suppressing health problems remain in limbo after immunization, uncertain how protected they really are. France and Israel already have begun offering an extra dose to transplant recipients and other immunocompromised people. In the U.S., those patients increasingly are pushing for — even lying to get — another shot, too.

Thursday, advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed some small studies that hint, but don't prove, a third dose might help at least some immunocompromised patients. The panel can't formally recommend an extra dose without Food and Drug Administration permission, but several advisers asked if the government could allow worried patients to sign up for one as part of a study.

"We are actively looking into ways that could be done," replied CDC's Dr. Amanda Cohn. "Stay tuned. We are working through those issues."

Jobless claims rise to 419,000

The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits rose last week from the lowest point of the pandemic, even as the job market appears to be rebounding on the strength of a reopened economy.

The Labor Department said Thursday that jobless claims increased last week to 419,000, the most in two months, from 368,000 the previous week. The number of first-time applications, which generally tracks layoffs, has fallen steadily since topping 900,000 in early January.

Economists characterized last week's increase as most likely a blip caused by some one-time factors and partly a result of the inevitable bumpiness in the week-to-week data. Applications for jobless aid jumped last week, for example, in Michigan, where some auto plants have temporarily shut down production because of supply shortages.

Existing home sales up in June

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes rose in June, snapping a four-month losing streak, while strong demand for higher-end properties and ultra-low mortgage rates helped push prices to new highs.

Existing homes sales rose 1.4% last month from May to a seasonally-adjusted annual rate of 5.86 million units, the National Association of Realtors said Thursday. That's just under the 5.9 million annual rate economists were expecting, according to FactSet.

Sales jumped 22.9% from June last year, when some states were still locked down due to the pandemic. Last month's home-sales pace is ahead of the 5.7 million annual rate in February 2020, before the coronavirus led to a spring slowdown in sales last year.

— Bulletin wire reports

Oregon advances job searches, training

Federal jobless benefits end Sept. 4

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

Weeks before the end of federal unemployment benefit programs on Sept. 4, Oregon Employment Department officials have shifted their efforts toward helping recipients get jobs — and not necessarily the jobs they had prior to the economic downturn resulting from the coronavirus pandemic last year.

"We want to make sure that people looking for work get the services they need, so they can be back at work before those important safety-net programs end," acting director David Ger-

stenfeld said.

He said that goes beyond reinstating federal work search requirements — that people are able to work, available for work, and actively seeking work to continue to qualify for unemployment benefits — and registering people for the iMatchSkills system to connect them with jobs.

Starting this past week, he said, several WorkSource offices have reopened for in-person appointments to help people with job searches and training. The pilot project involves only offices in Eugene, on the coast, and in Southern and Eastern Oregon.

All WorkSource offices, which are partnerships between

the state agency and others, have been accepting telephone and online appointments for job seekers. They do not process benefit claims.

Agency economist Gail Krumenauer said a couple of studies of the 25 states that chose to end extra federal benefits ahead of schedule — Oregon is not among them — do not indicate that they have caused massive dislocations for unemployed workers. One study was by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the other by the national job listing website Indeed.

Krumenauer says about 32,500 people still are unable to come back to work for various reasons related to the coronavirus pandemic. They may be

ailing themselves, have responsibility to care for family members, or unable to obtain child care.

But that total is down from 66,000 last fall, and Krumenauer said the number of unemployment benefit recipients has dropped in recent months.

The two-month plunge from February to April 2020, when Oregon lost almost 290,000 jobs (about one in seven) after the pandemic resulted in business curtailments and closures, has now been deemed a recession. The usual federal definition of a recession is a decline in gross domestic product — the measure of goods and services — for two consecutive quarters.

Oregon's unemployment rate

shot up from a record low 3.5% in March 2020 to a record adjusted high of 13.2% in April 2020, and the number of unemployment claims also topped 500,000 within a short period. The rate has since declined; it was 5.6% in June, although Oregon has regained only about two-thirds of the lost jobs. A full recovery is projected in late 2022 or early 2023.

Oregon job growth in the first six months of this year equaled the number of jobs created in the 22 months prior to the pandemic in early 2020. But Oregon businesses reported almost 98,000 job vacancies this past spring, a record since that statistic was first compiled in 2013.

Returning summer tourists help businesses in Bend and beyond

Travel group says spending may not fully rebound until 2024

BY MAE ANDERSON

Associated Press

Small businesses in the U.S. that depend on tourism and vacationers say business is bouncing back, as Americans rebook postponed trips and spend freely on food, entertainment and souvenirs.

U.S. states and cities have loosened many of their restrictions on crowd size and mask-wearing, a positive sign for businesses that struggled for more than a year when theme parks and other tourist attractions were shuttered.

Still, the return to a pre-pandemic "normal" is a way off for most. There are few business travelers and international tourists. Many businesses are grappling with staff shortages and other challenges. And if a surge of the more contagious delta variant or another variant of the coronavirus forces states to reenact restrictions or lockdowns, the progress might be lost.

The U.S. Travel Association, a travel industry trade group, predicts domestic travel spending will total \$787 billion in 2021. That's up 22% from 2020 but still down 20% from 2019 levels. The association predicts travel spending won't completely rebound above 2019 levels until 2024.

But so far, tourists have been freewheeling with spending, some small-business owners say.

Alan Dietrich, CEO of Crater Lake Spirits by Bendistillery, which has two tasting rooms catering to tourists including one in downtown Bend, said he's seen an explosion in demand since pandemic restrictions were fully lifted ahead of the Fourth of July.

"Every minute we're open, we're seeing people coming in," he said. "People have been locked down for the last 14 months. They're dying for something to do. The limiting factor is just staff."

He is also seeing people spending freely. In Bend, the average price of an entree has gone up \$3 and the price of a cocktail has gone up \$1 due to staffing shortages and higher wholesale food prices, said Dietrich, who also sits on the board of Visit Bend, the city's contracted tourism development agency.

"No one is balking at the prices at all," he added. "Nobody cares what stuff costs right now, people are just happy to be out and about."



Crater Lake Spirits by Bendistillery tasting room at 1024 NW Bond St. in downtown Bend.

Submitted/Bulletin file

Pandemic job loss for hotels

Even as tourists return to popular destinations, a new report says nearly 500,000 hotel jobs lost in the United States during the pandemic will not return this year.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association released its midyear report with

two key findings: One in five of the lodging jobs lost nationwide would not come back by January, and revenues will be off by \$44 billion nationwide from their highs in 2019.

In a state-by-state breakdown, the organization estimated that Oregon would lose 5,235 hotel jobs by year's end.

COVID-19 relief bill

Feds announce economic development grants

BY ZEKE MILLER AND JOSH BOAK

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's administration is beginning to make \$3 billion in economic development grants available to communities — a tenfold increase in the program paid for by this year's COVID-19 relief bill.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said her agency on Thursday will begin accept-

ing applications for the competitive grants, which officials hope will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and help struggling cities and towns make long-term investments to drive development for years to come. Applications for the grants are available at the website for Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration.

"This is about real help for communities across the coun-

try as they rebuild," Raimondo said Wednesday in an interview with The Associated Press. "It's about longer-term investments to help communities build themselves back from the bottom up in the ways that work best for them."

The grants will be targeted at supporting local infrastructure, job training programs and developing new industries. Recipients will be selected on the basis of the anticipated return on

investment to taxpayers, which Raimondo said at Thursday's White House briefing would involve job creation and racial and gender equity goals. She estimated that 300,000 jobs would be created by the grants in the near term.

"Our number one investment priority is equity," Raimondo said. "In order to qualify to get the money, you'll have to prove to us that you'll have an equity lens."

The administration hopes that the competitive nature of the program will also coax private businesses and philanthropies to focus on rehabilitating their communities by making their own development commitments. There will be \$1 billion available for 20 to 30 regions to spend on projects that would rebuild their economies, as well as \$750 million in grants targeted for travel, tourism and outdoor recreation.