



Eagle file photo

Blue Mountain Hospital District Director of EMS Rebekah Rand prepares a shot at a previous vaccination clinic.

# All Oregonians will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccines by July 1

Phase 2 eligibility begins March 29

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Every adult in Oregon will be eligible for vaccination against COVID-19 by July 1, with the two-shot vaccines reaching all adults who want it by August, Gov. Kate Brown said Friday.

“Come summer, any Oregonian who wants the vaccine can receive it,” Brown announced at a virtual press conference.

It was a surprisingly optimistic forecast after recent estimates that the vaccination of the entire state would stretch into autumn or even early 2022.

Oregon has had one of the lowest COVID-19 infection rates in the nation, with 154,878 infections and 2,206 deaths through Friday. Nationwide, there have been just under 28.5 million infections and 510,089 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

The shorter timeline announced Friday is based on reports from the Biden Administration that Pfizer and Moderna, the maker of the two currently available vaccines, will hit their production targets, which would increase the number of doses coming to states.

A third vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson was approved by the FDA Saturday and requires just one inoculation.

Logistical bottlenecks are being cleared, and Biden is bringing in more help for states.

In Oregon, Phase 1 vaccine eligibility, which covers about 1.36 million people, reaches its last eligibility milestone Monday, when those age 65-69 can make appointments.

The state then plans to use most of March to catch up with some of the Phase 1 backlog.

Phase 2 eligibility begins March 29, when residents 45-64 with medical conditions that the Centers for Disease Control defines as making them more likely to become seriously ill or die if infected with COVID-19, can sign-up. Conditions include cancer, heart conditions, kidney disease, COPD, Down syndrome, compromised immune systems, sickle cell disease and type 2 diabetes. Pregnancy is on the list, as is obesity that results in a Body

Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or more.

Residents should consult with their doctor and with the full explanation of qualifying conditions on the CDC and Oregon Health Authority websites.

Also eligible on March 29 are some farm and food industry workers, homeless people, residents of low-income or congregate housing, wildland firefighters and those displaced by the 2020 wildfires.

On May 1, those 16-44 with medical conditions on the CDC list can sign up, along with “frontline” workers with jobs dealing with the public, and any adult living in a multi-generational household.

Phase 2 wraps up with anyone over 45 eligible on June 1 and anyone over 16 on July 1.

No vaccine approved for children is available yet, though several are under development.

The optimistic scenario for the future clashed with the reality of widespread frustration over the gap between eligibility and availability. Brown and Allen forecast “chaos” last month for the system of large vaccination centers and local pharmacies that will handle inoculation of seniors across the state.

The central math problem is too little vaccine for too many arms.

Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen pointed out Oregon is at or above the national average of 15% of the populace having received at least one shot.

But a look at the numbers is daunting and, at least for now, disappointing.

About 1.36 million people in Oregon are in Phase 1. Each vaccination requires two shots, or 2.72 million shots for the group.

Oregon is not close to reaching that number. Between the vaccine first becoming available at the end of December 2020 and Friday, Oregon reports it has injected 911,648 doses.

That would leave 1.8 million shots needed to cover Phase 1 with a month to go until Phase 2 starts.

Oregon has ramped up to about 20,000 shots per day and forecasts expanding the number of places and people who can inoculate those eligible as the vaccine supply increases.

One number that’s not known is how many people are refusing the offer to be inoculated.

Allen said neither state or federal officials are tracking who is eligible but declines the vaccine. The higher that number, the more vaccine is actually available for those that want it.

Allen said OHA is still vaccinating Phase 1 groups who want to be inoculated but have not yet been able to get to a vaccine site.

**AT A GLANCE**

- March 29**
- Adults age 45 to 64 with underlying health conditions, as defined by the CDC
  - Seasonal workers, such as migrant farm workers, seafood and agricultural workers and food processing workers
  - Currently displaced victims of the September 2020 wildfires
  - Wildland firefighters
  - People living in low-income and congregate senior housing
  - Homeless
- May 1**
- Individuals age 16-45 with underlying health conditions
  - All other frontline workers as defined by the CDC
  - Multigenerational household members
- June 1**
- Adults 45 to 64
- July 1**
- Everyone age 16 and over

Brown said pausing this month will allow Oregon to catch up on the backlog.

“We want to keep our commitment to our seniors,” Brown said.

Allen said Phase 2 will begin March 29 regardless of how many Phase 1 people get inoculated.

Brown has been sharply criticized for her decision last month to depart from CDC guidelines recommending the next priority go to vaccinating those over 65. In Oregon, 90% of COVID-19 deaths have been age 60 or older.

The governor opted to put 153,000 teachers, school staff and day care workers ahead of seniors.

Brown argued the school group was small compared to the nearly 800,000 seniors. To wait would likely wipe out any chance to get schoolchildren back in classrooms in the spring.

Learning in the classroom is overall far better and equitable than “virtual” learning where a laptop or tablet and internet connection can be difficult to obtain for poorer families. Schools also offer hot meals, and check in on children’s mental and physical health, while freeing parents to work outside the home.

Critics said even a short delay that led to an avoidable death was wrong, with unofficial estimates putting the possible deaths from the two-week delay at up to 100.

OHA said it would issue updated guidance on the availability of vaccine and the various ways to sign-up and receive a notification when a resident’s eligibility group comes up.

## 300 people vaccinated Monday

Six new cases, the first in weeks, announced Tuesday

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County put shots of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine in the arms of 300 people Monday at the county fairgrounds, and the county announced six new cases in the Mt. Vernon and Prairie City ZIP codes Tuesday.

Kimberly Lindsay, the county’s public health administrator, said the health department finished vaccinating those in the 70 and above age group along with health care providers and educators who were in previous priority groups. She said they started immunizing people in the 65 and older age group who became eligible on Monday.

Lindsay said the Oregon Health Authority did not provide the county with

enough doses to vaccinate everyone in the 65 and over age group. She said to do so would have required an additional 110 shots.

Lindsay said the county should receive 300 first doses and 100 booster shots later this week.

After the county vaccinates those in the 65 and over age group, Lindsay said, the health department will move into the 45-64 age group for people with specific underlying medical conditions.

She said this group includes migrant and seasonal farm workers, agricultural workers, food processing workers, people in low-income senior housing and senior congregate, independent living situations and the homeless and wildland firefighters.

Lindsay said after finishing up this group they can move into group seven, which includes frontline workers. According to the state’s guidelines, a front-

line worker is someone who has a job that puts them at higher risk for contracting COVID-19 because of regular close contact with others outside of their household at less than 6 feet of distance — this includes food service workers, including restaurant, bar and kitchen staff.

Lindsay said health care providers in Grant County were not involved in developing the order of sequencing, but, she said, they are required to follow it.

“We do have some questions given that we have only about 400 additional people on our wait list and will be speaking with the state this week for guidance,” she said.

Lindsay said, assuming the county receives its vaccine shipment, they plan to hold a vaccine clinic on March 8 to vaccinate those in the 65 and older age group who are on the wait list and may begin to move into the next eligible group.

## Contract with hospital management company ends this month

Board declines to discuss future

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Blue Mountain Hospital District has entered the final month of its contract with management company Health TechS3.

According to hospital CEO Derek Daly, the contract with the company — which provides various services ranging from financial audits to a group purchasing organization to reduce costs for supplies — officially expires on March 31.

The hospital board opted not to renew the company’s contract at its Nov. 19 meeting.

Hospital board chair Amy Kreger has declined to comment on the specifics of the board’s decision and what the hospital’s management will look like as of April 1.

The Eagle has filed a public records request for information related to board’s decision to end the contract with Health TechS3.

BMHD, which is a critical access hospital, is partially funded by local property taxes. According to David Thunell, the county’s tax assessor, the hospital’s taxing district will receive \$1,339,290 during the 2020-21 tax year.

Thunell said the hospital recently retired its 2001 bond, which was for \$7 million over 20 years. He said the bond received \$740,223 for the 2020-21 tax year.

Mike Lieb, the regional vice president of Health TechS3, said in his Thursday report that it looks like the hospital and the management company are getting very close to having all of the final documents agreed upon. He said they should be ready within the next week.

*Congratulations Michelle Ray!*

Michelle has obtained her National CDM license. She finished #1 in her class at the College of Western Idaho with a GPA of 3.83.

*Way to go, Michelle!*

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Congratulations to Traci Frazier for obtaining her Principal Broker license. The course requires extensive hours of study in order to take the national and state exams. Principal Broker Jerry Franklin owner of Eastern Oregon Realty and the crew are very proud of the important accomplishment. Traci has been with the company since 2015. If you're looking to buy or sell, give Traci a call at **541-620-0925**.

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