

Afghan girls soccer team in Portugal gets surprise visit

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Girls from the Afghanistan national soccer team who were recently granted asylum in Portugal have had a surprise visit from the captain of the senior team.

Farkhunda Muhtaj, a professional player who from her home in Canada spent weeks helping arrange their recent rescue from Afghanistan, flew into the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, for an emotional reunion with the girls' team last week.

As the sun set over the River Tagus, the girls, between 14 and 16 years old, and their families gathered on the riverbank and hugged and kissed Muhtaj amid smiles and tears.

"They have dedicated so much, they have been so resilient, and to finally see them in person has been so emotional because I knew how much they went through," Muhtaj said.

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the girls and their families tried to leave their country. They feared



how their lives might change under the Taliban — not only because women and girls are not allowed to play sports, but because they were advocates for girls and active members of their communities.

What made the rescue mission harder was the size of the group — 80 people, including the 26 youth team members as well as adults and other children, including

OPERATION SOCCER BALLS. Members of the Afghanistan national girls soccer team and their families visit a park by the Tagus river in Lisbon, on September 29, 2021. The girls and their families arrived in Portugal September 19 after an international coalition came to their rescue. (AP Photo/Ana Brigida)

infants.

"You are a fantastic nation for impacting the lives of so many girls and for supporting us in so many ways and providing these girls with asylum," Muhtaj said, thanking Portugal for taking them in.

The rescue mission, called Operation Soccer Balls, was coordinated with the Taliban through an international coalition of former U.S. military and intelligence officials, U.S. senator Chris Coons, U.S. allies, and humanitarian groups, according to Nic McKinley, a CIA and Air Force veteran who founded Dallas-based DeliverFund, a nonprofit that's secured housing for 50 Afghan families.

On Thursday last week, the girls practiced with Muhtaj at a soccer pitch in Odivelas, outside Lisbon.

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Health

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Tests detect variants.

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Scientists track variants.

Laboratories in Oregon perform sequencing on a subset of positive PCR tests, looking for the specific mutations that appear in the Delta variant.

Sequencing is a process in which scientists map the entire genetic makeup of a virus. This allows them to determine which variants are circulating in a certain area and how prevalent they are.



Health

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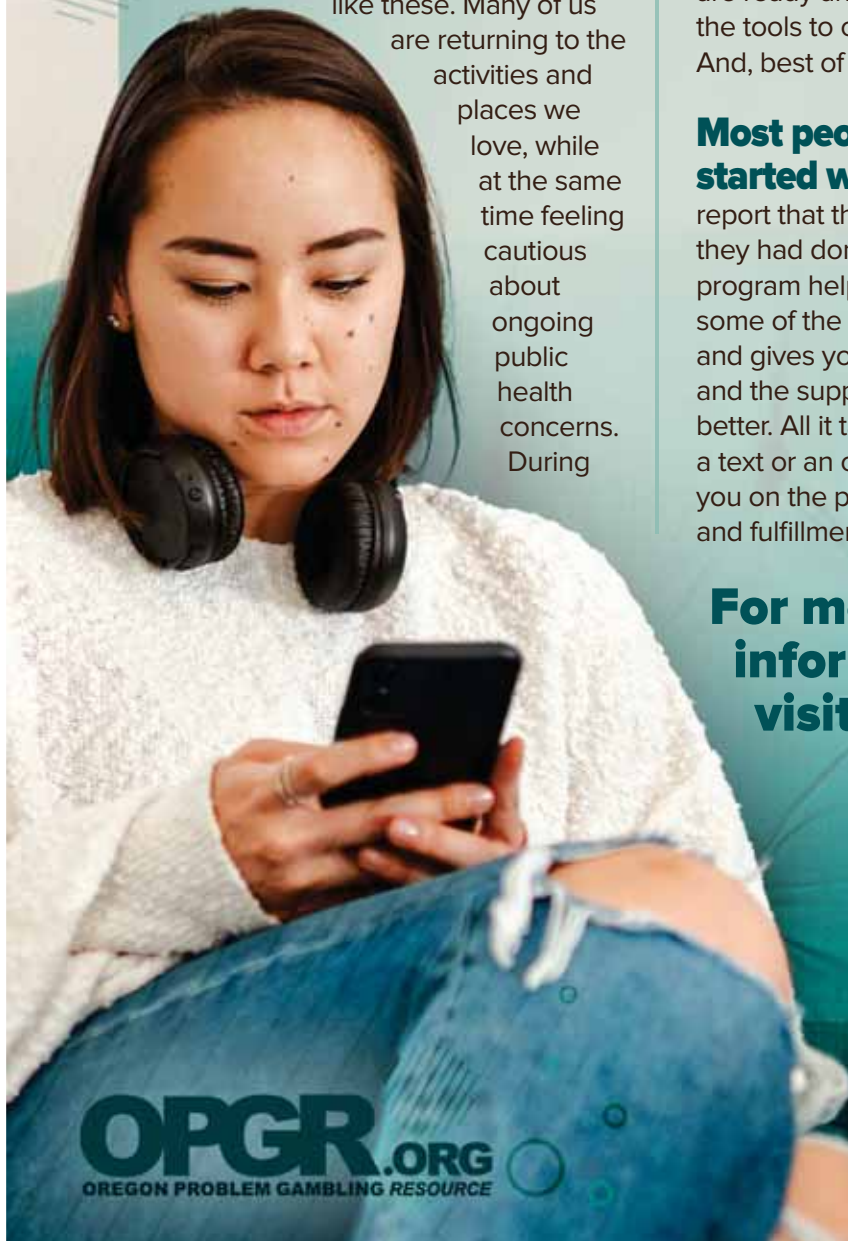
Unfortunately for some, what starts out as a way to pass time with family and friends becomes a habit that's difficult to break, especially during times like these. Many of us are returning to the activities and places we love, while at the same time feeling cautious about ongoing public health concerns. During

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