

# Booster shots against the virus lag on the North Coast

By ERICK BENGEL  
The Astorian

The Clatsop County Public Health Department is planning a community survey to better understand the reasons behind the less-than-expected rates of booster shots against the coronavirus.

Boosters have been widely available since last fall, when the fallout from the delta variant — the worst wave of the pandemic locally in terms of hospitalizations and deaths — was still felt in the community. Yet the number of residents who have received the extra jab continues to lag behind the county's vaccination rates.

As of mid-March, 86.5% of residents 65 and older have completed their initial vaccination series — the two-dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine — compared with 64%



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

## Booster shots lag in Clatsop County.

who have received a booster, according to the county.

Residents 50 to 64 have a 77.5% vaccination rate, compared with 45.9% who have received a booster.

Residents 20 to 49 have a 67.3% vaccination rate, compared with 27.5% who have received a booster.

And residents 18 to 19 have a 53.4% vaccination rate, compared with 16.2% who have received a booster.

Statewide, 75.5% of Oregon residents 18 and older

are fully vaccinated, compared with 44.4% who have had a booster. The gap persists despite evidence that a booster dose significantly decreases the severity of illness and the risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

The survey from the Public Health Department will reflect the community's experience during the vaccination campaign, which began early last year, and help the county address

ongoing concerns, such as information that needs to be clarified or myths that need to be countered.

The plan to take stock comes as Gov. Kate Brown lifted Oregon's mask mandate, the surge of the omicron variant recedes and the virus case and hospitalization counts dwindle. The governor intends to lift the state emergency over the virus in April.

This month marked the second anniversary of the first recorded COVID-19 case in Clatsop County.

The county had recorded 4,572 virus cases as of March 23.

The Public Health Department said that the availability of at-home testing means that the official count probably does not capture the true total. Some people who got a positive result in private may not have reported it.

Margo Lalich, the county's interim public health director, said the county's vaccination campaign has

been successful. While the health department did not expect that everyone would get vaccinated, the county has among the highest vaccination rates in the state: 73.6%.

"The pandemic is not over," she said. "While guidance and policies are always changing, we're still in a pandemic, and we're learning how to live with this virus circulating in the community."

A new concern is how to navigate a world where wearing masks as a precaution against the virus is voluntary.

Businesses have recently reached out to Lalich about masking. She heard stories of employees dealing with customers who resented the mask mandate, especially customers who visited from places without mandates. Some people became angry and belligerent and verbally abused employees who were trying to provide customer service.

Lalich hopes the voluntary approach comes to be seen as part of the community's diversity.

"We don't know everyone's story, and there may be a reason why somebody needs to wear a mask," she said, "and so don't assume you know — just allow them to wear a mask as they're choosing to wear a mask, just like people do all kinds of things with how they present to society and it's their choice to do so."

Although the pandemic is moving into a new phase, Lalich said it is important to remember: "We've been here before. We were here before delta ... We removed the masks, everyone got together, and then we went through two surges after that."

The world is experiencing a period of calm. "And yet we also don't know what may be," she said. "And so there's this sense of humble anticipation."

## Merkley discusses salmon losses at virtual town hall

By ERICK BENGEL  
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Depleted salmon stocks, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the health of the environment and of American democracy were top of mind for Clatsop County residents who attended U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's virtual town hall on Saturday afternoon.

The event came as the Oregon Democrat's party faces uncertain prospects in the midterm elections in November.

Democrats could lose majorities in Congress, as inflation continues and polls indicate most voters disapprove of President Joe Biden's performance.

Merkley highlighted the local impact of Democratic leadership, including the \$7.8 million the county received from the American Rescue Plan Act. The money will fund grants for small businesses, affordable housing, mental health services, rural health care, internet access and emergency preparedness, among other items. Cities within the county received several million dollars, as well.

Merkley also touted an omnibus spending package that includes \$1 million for a waterline project

in Hammond. The upgrade is designed to prevent low water pressure when industrial demand is high.

Concerns about decreasing salmon levels arose repeatedly in the one-hour town hall — Merkley's 20th of the year and 488th as U.S. senator. The senator holds the events annually in each of the state's 36 counties.

Several speakers pushed for Merkley to get involved in the multistate effort to remove dams from the Snake River — the tributary that runs from Wyoming through Idaho and meets the Columbia River in southeast Washington state — to help restore the salmon population.

Bob Rees, a fishing guide from Hammond, said, "We're hopeful that we can find a way for the Senate offices to kind of integrate into this conversation and find a solution that works for rural communities."

Judith Huck, of Astoria, echoed Rees' comments on the importance of salmon to the community and the need to remove the dams. "There's just a fraction of the number of salmon in the Columbia River than there used to be," she said, "and we do need you to be working towards improving that situation."

## PUBLIC SAFETY LOG

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### Log truck, pickup crash

Three Seaside men were involved in a serious injury crash March 16 at 6:46 a.m. on U.S. Highway 26 near milepost 24. State police say three vehicles were involved. One man was seriously injured and taken by medical helicopter to Emmanuel Hospital. The other two men were not injured. A preliminary investigation showed a westbound gray Nissan Maxima crossed the centerline, colliding head-on with an eastbound loaded Kenworth log truck. After impact with the log truck, the Nissan continued westbound and struck a 2019 Ford F-250 pickup. Due to the extensive damage and vehicles blocking the Quartz Creek bridge, Highway 26 was closed for approximately 3 hours following the crash. State police were assisted by the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office and ODOT.

### Driving with suspended license

James Daryl Collins, 40, was arrested March 17 at 6:09 p.m., on U.S. Highway 101 near milepost 19 after troopers pulled him over for a moving violation. He told the trooper, who already knows him, his license is criminally suspended and he has no car insurance. He was taken to the county jail and

his Dodge Neo was left at his residence.

### Charge after pickup hits guardrail

A Vancouver, Washington, man was arrested March 18 at 4:41 p.m. on U.S. Highway 26 near milepost 10 after troopers received a report of dangerous driving; they saw a gold Toyota pickup strike a guardrail and then pull into Camp 18. The driver, Lucas Pena Castellon, 34, was arrested shortly after for driving while under the influence of intoxicants. Police stayed with a passenger and the truck until a licensed sober driver arrived to drive it. Castellon was transported to the county jail where he submitted to a chemical test.

### Alcohol-related crash

A 32-year-old Seaside man was taken by medical helicopter to a hospital March 18 around 7:20 p.m. after troopers responded to a reported rollover crash on U.S. Highway 26 near milepost 19. Police say he was heading east when he swerved across the westbound lane and then launched his vehicle down an embankment. He had to be extricated from the vehicle by responding firefighters. After he was taken by medical helicopter to an unnamed hospital, police were informed by hospital staff he was over the legal limit for alcohol. Troopers went to the hospital to get blood samples from the driver. Due to road conditions, his truck couldn't be towed until the next day.

### Field sobriety tests refused

Justin M. Easley, 38, was arrested March 19 at 7:36 p.m., on U.S. Highway 101 near milepost 18. Troopers responded to the scene to assist Gearhart police. While appearing intoxicated, Easley refused to perform field sobriety tests and was arrested by Gearhart police who brought him to Seaside police headquarters for further testing.



### Feb. 9

12:42 p.m., gas leak, Summit.  
4:31 p.m., building fire, South Columbia, Seaside.

### Feb. 11

12:00 a.m., controlled burning, Arrowhead, Warrenton.  
12:00 a.m., extrication, rescue, Avenue G.

1:37 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Bailey.

7:10 a.m., alarm system activation, unintentional, no fire, Railroad.

7:28 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Sandy Ridge.

2:41 p.m., public service assistance, Pacific Way.

### Feb. 12

1:37 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Bailey.

11:04 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Warrenton.

### Feb. 13

10:59 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Sandy Ridge.

9:25 a.m., alarm system activation, unintentional, no fire, Patricia Ann.

### Feb. 16

11:56 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Picture.

6:30 p.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Blue Heron, Warrenton.

### Feb. 18

11:41 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Wild Daffodil, Warrenton.

12:24 p.m., medical assist, U.S. Highway 101, Gearhart.

4:57 p.m., trapped by power lines, South Ocean.

### Feb. 19

10:03 a.m., medical assist, Hawkins, Warrenton.

### Feb. 21

6:55 p.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Ocean, Surf Pines.

### Feb. 22

11:50 a.m., building fire, Maple, Elsie.

### Feb. 25

11:12 a.m., motor vehicle crash, no injuries, Lewis and Clark.

1:30 p.m., medical assist, U.S. Highway 101, Warrenton.

11:56 p.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, Pacific Way.

### Feb. 26

11:29 p.m., motor vehicle accident with injuries, U.S. Highway 101 and Pacific Way.

### Feb. 27

12:02 a.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, U.S. Highway 101, Warrenton.

7:07 p.m., medical assist, assist EMS crew, U.S. Highway 101, Gearhart.



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