

# ESOL News Oregon

## **Fewer masks have led to more COVID cases, but state is not changing its response**

(APRIL 22, 2022) The situation around COVID-19 in Oregon and around the country is changing quickly. While some individual businesses or services still require masks indoors (such as Portland Community College), many others have dropped the requirement. This week, a federal judge made a national ruling that the government was no longer requiring masks on transportation, such as airplanes. Soon, TriMet, the Portland-area regional transportation agency, dropped its requirement for buses and MAX trains.

However, according to data from the Oregon Health Authority, the number of COVID cases in the state has started to increase again. They reached a low of about 200-300 new cases per day in the end of March. This week, the number jumped to nearly 900. Similarly, the number of patients in the hospital for COVID has also fallen to its lowest point since the pandemic began. On Tuesday, April 19, the number of people in Oregon hospitals rose to 122, which is still low, but increasing. Deaths remain low, with a single death on April 15 and none since.

The OHA held a meeting for journalists on Wednesday. Deputy state health officer Tom Jeanne said these numbers were expected.

"It's been a little more than four weeks since the lifting of mask use in most settings, and some of the jump we're seeing in case counts is likely tied to less mask use, and more Oregonians gathering indoors and returning to pre-pandemic social

activities,” Jeanne said. He noted that the effect of the dropping of the federal mask requirements this week may, or may not, add to the problem.

Regardless, case numbers are no longer a reliable measurement since many people test at home and do not report the results to the state. So state officials are watching the hospitalization rate with greater interest. However, while the hospitalization numbers are still low now, officials know that this data tends to be a lagging indicator. That means that the effects (higher hospitalization) do not usually show up until weeks after the cause (higher infections).

“We’re also going to see an impact on our hospitalizations, eventually here, and deaths, as those cases go up,” Jeanne said. “But the projections look like any peak we’re going to see in the near future here is going to be quite a bit lower than our large peaks last year and this past winter.”

So state government plans have not changed. For now, the focus remains on vaccination shots, including boosters. Masks will remain optional in most places unless the local business or service requires them.

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