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# Oregon's spike in deaths wasn't just COVID-19



A group of mostly home care workers observes a moment of silence March 25 during a candle-lit vigil at the Oregon State Capitol. BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Experts believe deaths from drug overdoses, cancer, heart conditions and Alzheimer's disease are related to the pandemic

**Bill Poehler**  
 Salem Statesman Journal  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Some of the older patients Salem oncologist Dr. Bud Pierce had been treating for cancer stopped showing up for regular visits in March 2020 as the state went on lockdown due to COVID-19.

It's unclear whether they had been afraid to venture out, or were unable to leave their assisted-living communities, or didn't have anyone willing to help them get to their appointments in the fearful days of the pandemic.

But they never came back.

Pierce said they died not from COVID-19, but from the lack of access to life-saving cancer treatments.

**Inside**

Oregon reports 761 new COVID-19 cases, no deaths. **2C**

It was expected 2020 would be the deadliest year in Oregon history due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But new data shows the spike can be attributed to more than just people dying after contracting the coronavirus.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, 40,150 people died last year, 3,853 more than the state's five-year average. Experts label those as excess deaths.

Of those, 1,719, or 44%, were attributed to COVID-19.

The remaining 2,134 died from other causes such as drug overdoses, cancer heart conditions and Alzheimer's disease.

But experts believe many of those may be indirectly related to the pandemic — people reluctant to go to the hospital or their doctor out of fear of contracting COVID-19, or a delay in addressing health problems due to prolonged isolation.

"I have been calling that collateral damage, the collateral damage of COVID-19, and that's been largely overlooked," said Chunhui Chi, director for the Center for Global Health at Oregon State University. "Actually, the collateral damage is way beyond that."

See **EXCESS**, Page 6A

## Some Oregon residents wary of taking vaccine

Among reasons: Quick development, unknown long-term side effects

**Tracy Loew**  
 Salem Statesman Journal  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Demand for COVID-19 vaccines is leveling off in some Oregon counties, even as eligibility drastically expands.

All Oregonians over the age of 16 will be eligible for vaccines on April 19. But officials expect by mid-May — well before the state achieves enough community immunity to stop the virus' spread — some areas will have more shots than people willing to get them.

Nationwide, about 25% of adults say they probably or definitely won't get the vaccine, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC

Center for Public Affairs Research. The Oregon Health Authority doesn't track or estimate the number of people refusing shots overall or in certain categories, such as health care workers, OHA spokeswoman Delia Hernández said.

But after weeks of eligibility for seniors, Oregon data is beginning to reflect that vaccine hesitancy.

In seven of the state's less populous counties, fewer than half of those age 65 and older have been vaccinated, OHA said.

In Marion County, 59% of residents age 65 and older have received at least one dose, according to OHA data. In Polk County, that figure is 63%, and in Lane County it is 62%.

The Statesman Journal asked residents why they might hesitate to get the shot. Most responses fell into three broad categories:

See **VACCINES**, Page 6A



**Dr. Bud Pierce, a Salem oncologist, said his practice saw a 15% decline in patient visits during the early months of the pandemic despite not closing.** STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

**"My sense from an oncology point of view, early on, people just couldn't get out of the nursing facilities. There wasn't the energy or ability to get there."**

**Dr. Bud Pierce**

**"Had this pandemic not limited our interactions and activity, more people could have lived longer. One could say those Alzheimer's patients died of loneliness."**

**Chunhui Chi**  
 Director for the Center for Global Health at Oregon State University

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