

Coronavirus

'COVID is no joke'

Man survives scary 'bout' of COVID-19

MYRTLE CREEK, Ore., Nov. 30, (AP): Howard Breidenbach thought it was all a big conspiracy.

The government using a so-called "coronavirus" to control the people. Feeding drama. Making up numbers.

"It was all a lie," he thought.

Until he forgot his own name.

The 47-year-old independent trucker from Myrtle Creek thumbed his nose at COVID-19. On July 14, something was wrong.

"We thought for sure it was pneumonia," Breidenbach's wife of 29 years, Tonja, said Monday. "I didn't feel very good either. When he got sick, I started feeling sick, too."

Howard's condition took a drastic turn. After spending a few days at CHI Mercy Medical Center, he was transferred to the intensive care unit, but there was only so much hospital staff could do for him. He needed specialized help, and he needed it fast.

One doctor called every hospital in the Pacific Northwest trying to find an extracorporeal membrane oxygenation machine — better known as ECMO — to help serve as an artificial lung for the 47-year-old, whose condition was continuing to deteriorate.

"That was very traumatic, very upsetting," Tonja said of the phone call she received in late July. "He might actually die."

No such machines were available in Oregon, but the doctor at Mercy was able to locate one in Seattle at the University of Washington Medical Center's Montlake facility. Howard, in a medically induced coma, was transported to Roseburg Regional Airport and flown to Seattle.

"I had no idea," Howard said of the transfer. "I went to sleep in Roseburg and woke up in Seattle."

For nearly 100 days, Howard was receiving a medical treatment that temporarily draws blood from the body, provides artificial oxygenation of the blood and returns it to the cardiovascular system.

On average, the survival rate of patients on such a treatment is estimated at 30%.

Quite simply, it was Howard's last chance.

Meanwhile, his wife was in quarantine in Myrtle Creek until Aug. 16, at which time she could travel to Seattle to try and see her husband.

Communicate

"It was horrible to see him like that," Tonja said. "His chest wasn't moving, he had a tube down his throat. They said it was very important to talk to him and he was trying to communicate back, but it was awful."

"They could wake him up, but it was more of a surface awakening to make sure he still had brain activity," she said.

"In a coma, you can hear voices but you can't make out voices," Howard said. "All I could hear was babbling. I honestly couldn't remember my name. I knew who I was, but I couldn't remember my name."

Howard and Tonja Breidenbach had big plans. They were in the process of launching their own trucking company with the goal of retiring within the next five to seven years. They had already bought the truck to get their dream off the ground and were eyeing more equipment. Now, the couple who had met in Heppner in 1990 was praying for the simple gift of another day together.

"I spent a lot of time on my knees praying," Tonja said. "You sure find out what's important."

Hooty B LLC, the Breidenbach's trucking company, is on permanent hold. The truck has been sold, as well as the couple's home, a sale which was finalized by a "thumbs-up" from Howard via video call.

Howard Breidenbach is now recuperating at his Myrtle Creek home with help from his wife Tonja Breidenbach.

During his 102 days in the hospital, Howard missed his 29th wedding anniversary. He was discharged from the hospital on Oct. 27 and had his 48th birthday on Nov. 11.

He credits pulmonary specialist Dr. Luana Petre Nedita for helping save his life.

"I owe her everything, and I want her to know it," Howard said.

Following Howard's ordeal, he and Tonja both agreed to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

"My idea was that we all get the shot and all die of cancer 10 years later," Howard said. "I was wrong, and now I've got myself to blame and am reaping my rewards."

"I'm 48 years old and have to have somebody take care of me. Every mental image you hold of yourself is lost."

"I kept having this dream we were at the coast, and it was so real. The picture we took, it wasn't there. I just kept waking up in the same nightmare," he said.

Today, both Howard and Tonja are encouraging those who are on the fence to vaccinate or not vaccinate to get the shot.

"I thought it was a scam until I got (COVID-19)," Howard said. "It's serious, and it's real."

"COVID is no joke."

Also:

THE HAGUE: Nations across Europe took new measures in an attempt to keep a COVID-19 spike from spiraling out of control, hoping that action now will safeguard the joys of Christmas next month.

A spike in cases fueled by the contagious delta variant forced governments to act to rein in infections even in countries not seeing surges and where vaccination rates are high.

Meanwhile, the world on Friday was confronted with yet another challenge in its long pandemic ordeal: the discovery of a new, potentially more transmissible COVID-19 variant found in southern Africa — which the World Health Organization on Friday named "Omicron" under its Greek letter system.

In Belgium, where a spike in cases and hospital admissions exceeded even the worst medical predictions, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo reinforced measures for the second time in little more than a week and closed night clubs, while bars and restaurants have to shut at 11 p.m. for the next three weeks.

"We have been hoodwinked by the delta variant," he said.

Referring to the more than 25,000 cases a day now in the country of 11 million, he said: "This is unprecedented in our country."

Neighboring Netherlands has been struggling with the virus just as much.

Health Minister Hugo De Jonge said hospitals across the Netherlands have been told to wind back planned surgeries and scale up acute care and intensive care beds to 1,350 nationwide to cope with the rising number of COVID patients.

The Dutch government tightened its lockdown Friday night amid swiftly rising infections and ICU admissions, although it kept open schools and universities — where most students will have to wear masks in corridors between lessons.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that for three weeks starting Sunday all venues such as bars, restaurants, theaters and shops selling non-essential items will close from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. Under the current lockdown they have to close at 8 p.m.

"The numbers are high, higher, highest," Rutte said of the soaring infections.

He said a panel of experts had advised the government to take action to reduce the number of contacts between people by at least 20%.



A man receives a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at a centre, in Soweto, Monday, Nov. 29. The World Health Organization has urged countries not to impose flight bans on southern African nations due to concerns over the new omicron variant. (AP)

Coronavirus

China pledges 1bn COVID vaccine doses to Africa

Many S. African new cases mild: doctor

JOHANNESBURG, Nov. 30, (Agencies): South Africa's rapid increase in COVID-19 cases attributed to the new omicron variant is resulting in mostly mild symptoms, doctors say.

"We've seen a sharp increase in cases for the past 10 days. So far they have mostly been very mild cases, with patients having flu-like symptoms: dry coughs, fever, night sweats, a lot of body pains," said Dr. Unben Pillay, a general practitioner in Gauteng province where 81% of the new cases have been reported.

"Most of these patients have been treated at home," Pillay told an online press briefing Monday. "Vaccinated people tend to do much better. We have not seen a vast increase in hospitalizations, but this is still early days. Hospitalizations often come several days after a rise in confirmed cases."

Most of the new cases in South Africa have been among people in their 20s and 30s, and doctors note that age group generally has milder symptoms of COVID-19 in any case. They warn that older people infected by the new variant could have more severe symptoms.

Learning more about the omicron variant is important as nations around the world sought Monday to keep the new variant at bay with travel bans and further restrictions, even as it remains unclear what the variant means for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Japan announced it would suspend entry for all foreign visitors, while new cases of the variant identified days ago by researchers in southern Africa appeared as far away as Hong Kong, Australia and Portugal. Portuguese authorities were investigating whether some infections there could be among the first reported cases of local transmission of the variant outside of southern Africa.

South Africa has seen its seven-day average of new cases over the past two weeks surge from about 200 per day to more than 2,000.

Omicron appears to be more transmissible than previous variants and the surge in South Africa could bring the daily number of new cases to 10,000 by the end of the week, infectious diseases specialist Salim Abdool Karim, told the briefing.

"Our biggest challenge will be to

Everyone ages 18 and up should get COVID-19 booster shot: CDC

WASHINGTON, Nov. 30, (AP): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday broadened its recommendation for COVID-19 booster shots for all adults as the new omicron variant is identified in more countries.

The agency had previously approved boosters for all adults, but only recommended them for those 50 years and older or if they live in a long-term care setting.

CDC Director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the new guidance reflects the emergence of the omicron variant, which has not yet been identified in the US but that officials say will inevitably reach the country.

stop super-spreading events, particularly indoors," he said, suggesting that it might be necessary to restrict indoor gatherings to those who are vaccinated.

The hotspot for the new surge is Gauteng's Tshwane metropolitan area, incorporating the capital, Pretoria. The "vast majority" of those hospitalized there have been unvaccinated people, said Waasila Jassat of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

Hospitalizations

"Of recent hospitalizations 87% have been unvaccinated, 13% have been vaccinated," Jassat said of the 455 hospital admissions in the Tshwane area in the past two weeks.

Vaccination appears to have also helped people avoid infection, she said.

Of South Africa's 60 million people, 16.5 million are vaccinated and the number of fully vaccinated who are testing positive is very small, said Nicholas Crisp, the acting director general of the department of health. "It is a very small number of those people who tested positive. It's minute in comparison to unvaccinated people."

To combat the surge of COVID-19 cases attributed to the omicron variant,

"Everyone ages 18 and older should get a booster shot either when they are 6 months after their initial Pfizer or Moderna series or 2 months after their initial J&J vaccine," she said in a statement.

Walensky also encouraged Americans feeling unwell to seek out a COVID-19 test, saying "Increased testing will help us identify Omicron quickly."

Meanwhile, Britain is extending its COVID-19 booster vaccine program to millions more people as part of efforts to tackle the spread of the new omicron variant, which is feared to be more contagious and vaccine-resistant.

South Africa is urging vaccinations and is weighing making vaccines mandatory to enter indoor areas, the minister of health said Monday.

The government is not planning to impose centralized vaccine mandates, but will support businesses and organizations that seek proof of vaccination to enter indoor areas, Minister of Health Joe Phaahla told reporters.

Meanwhile, China's president pledged to offer Africa one billion Covid vaccine doses on Monday, with the continent struggling to acquire enough jobs to immunize against the disease.

In a speech made via video link to a China-Africa summit near Senegal's capital Dakar, President Xi Jinping said his country would donate 600 million doses directly.

A further 400 million doses would come from other sources, such as investments in production sites, which are sorely lacking across much of Africa.

Xi's promise comes as part of a forum between China and African states with an emphasis on trade and security, among other issues, held in the city of Diamniadio near Senegal's seaside capital.



Lava flows from a volcano on the Canary island of La Palma, Spain, Tuesday, Nov. 30. Several new volcanic vents opened in La Palma, releasing new lava that flowed fast down a ridge and threatened to widen the impact on evacuated land, infrastructure and homes. (AP)



Makovicky



Spinrad

Ecology

Feds ask ships to slow down: Scientists have detected a rare species of whale southeast of New York City, and the federal government is using a voluntary protected zone to try to keep them safe.

There are fewer than 350 North Atlantic right whales left, according to scientists.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said the protected zone, which is south of Long Island and east of New Jersey, will be in effect until Sunday. NOAA administrator is Richard W. Spinrad.

NOAA said mariners are asked to avoid to area altogether or move through it slowly. The whales are vulnerable to ship collisions and entanglement in fishing gear.

An acoustic array detected the presence of the whales in the area on Nov. 20, NOAA said.

Other zones to protect the whales are off Maryland and Massachusetts. (AP)

'More duck-billed dino': Finding the fossils of a large duck-billed dinosaur in southern Missouri is exciting enough, but a paleontologist who helped lead the dig believes there are many more in the same area.

The latest fossils are a specimen of Parrosaurus missouriensis, first discovered at the same site in Bollinger County nearly 80 years ago but not confirmed as a new species until the latest dig. Experts believe the plant-eating dinosaurs grew to around 35 feet (11 meters) in length. Remains of four of the species have been found in the same area about 110 miles (180 kilometers) south of St. Louis.

Last month, a crane hoisted a 2,500-pound (1,130-kilogram) chunk of remains from the latest find from the glen of a wooded area. The fossils will go to Chicago's Field Museum for further research.

University of Minnesota Paleontologist Peter Makovicky, who helped lead the dig, said Monday that he believes the remains of many other dinosaurs will be found at the site.

"We actually have something that's probably a mass death locality, where we have a herd of dinosaurs dying and being sort of buried together, and individuals of different ages," Makovicky said.

"We can start looking at how these dinosaurs grew, start to understand a little bit about their biology and their possible herd structure. And that's unique for a site east of the Great Plains. Most of what we know about the North American dinosaur

comes from out west," Makovicky said. The first dinosaur fossils at the Missouri site were found in the early 1940s, uncovered

by a family digging a well. Experts weren't sure what sort of dinosaur it was and the bones were shelved for a long time.



In this undated photo provided by Peter J. Makovicky, a dinosaur's body has been wrapped with plaster bandages to protect it during removal and transport, in southern Missouri, as team members Akiko Shinya, (left), and Mlyoung Son tunnel through the clay under the jacket to loosen it so it can be flipped and the underside wrapped with plaster bandages. (AP)

A Missouri paleontologist purchased the property in the 1980s. A second set of dinosaur bones were found then.

Meanwhile, Guy Darrough, a fossil enthusiast and curator of the Sainte Genevieve Museum Learning Center in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, got permission to start digging around. About 10 years ago, he found fossils confirmed to be a juvenile dinosaur. (AP)

Roadrunner ends up in Maine: A wayward roadrunner is on the mend in Maine after traveling across the country in a moving van.

The greater roadrunner, a species native to Southwestern states, hitched a ride in the storage area of a moving van from Las Vegas to Westbrook, Maine. Volunteers took the bird to Avian Haven, a bird rehabilitation facility in Maine.

Avian Haven representatives said that they took the call about the bird and that it continued to rest. They said in a Facebook post that the bird was in "remarkably good shape" for having been stuck in a van for four days but might have lost weight during the journey.

The center is looking at ways to return the roadrunner to Nevada once it is healthy enough, said Diane Winn, Avian Haven's executive director.

The center has created a special habitat for the bird that is warmer than its typical outdoor areas while also being sufficiently roomy, the group said. (AP)