

# Groton Daily Independent

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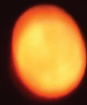
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**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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**For those of you who get up early in the morning, you got to see a nice red moonset.**

## Senior Legion Region 6B

### 4-Hit Day For Doeden Earns Groton Victory Over Claremont

Jonathan Doeden had a busy day at the plate on Thursday, smacking four hits in Groton Post 39's 14-8 victory over Claremont Post 262. Doeden doubled in the second, doubled in the fourth, doubled in the fifth, and singled in the sixth.

Groton Post 39 earned the victory despite allowing Claremont Post 262 to score six runs in the fourth inning. Kade Larson, Benjamin Gustafson, Colin Frey, and William Cutler each had RBIs in the big inning.

Groton Post 39 got things moving in the first inning, when Chandler Larson singled on a 1-0 count, scoring two runs.

After Claremont Post 262 scored one run in the top of the third, Groton Post 39 answered with one of their own. Claremont Post 262 scored when Cutler doubled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run. Groton Post 39 then answered when Cade Larson singled on a 2-1 count, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 pulled away for good with two runs in the fourth inning. In the fourth Alex Morris singled on a 1-0 count, scoring one run and Frey induced Jayden Zak to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Groton Post 39 notched five runs in the sixth inning. Groton Post 39 offense in the inning was led by Darien Shabazz, Doeden, Morris, and Larson, who all drove in runs.

Morris got the win for Groton Post 39. The pitcher lasted six and two-thirds innings, allowing ten hits and eight runs while striking out nine and walking one. Jackson Cogley threw one-third of an inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Boston Marlow started the game for Claremont Post 262. The pitcher surrendered five runs on three hits over one inning, striking out two and walking zero. Frey and Gustafson entered the game from the bullpen, throwing four and a third innings and two-thirds of an inning respectively.

Groton Post 39 totaled 13 hits in the game. Doeden, Morris, and Larson all managed multiple hits for Groton Post 39. Doeden led Groton Post 39 with four hits in five at bats.

Claremont Post 262 scattered ten hits in the game. Cutler, Gustafson, and Jesse Keough each collected multiple hits for Claremont Post 262. Cutler went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Claremont Post 262 in hits.

### Salmen's Walk-Off Seals The Deal In Redfield Victory Over Groton

A walk-off fielder's choice led Redfield Post 92 past Groton Post 39 6-5 on Thursday. The game was tied at five with Redfield Post 92 batting in the bottom of the seventh when Darien Shabazz induced Eric Salmen to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Groton Post 39 scored three runs in the fourth inning, but Redfield Post 92 still managed to pull out the victory. Peyton Johnson and Cade Larson all drove in runs in the frame.

Groton Post 39 got on the board in the first inning when Chandler Larson singled on a 1-2 count, scoring one run.

Keaton Rohfls was credited with the victory for Redfield Post 92. The pitcher went seven innings, allowing five runs on seven hits and striking out four.

Shabazz took the loss for Groton Post 39. Shabazz allowed zero hits and one run over two-thirds of an inning, striking out one.

Johnson started the game for Groton Post 39. The pitcher went three and a third innings, allowing three runs on three hits and striking out one

Owen Osborn went 2-for-4 at the plate to lead Redfield Post 92 in hits.

Alex Morris led Groton Post 39 with two hits in four at bats.

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## #453 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Cases have almost tripled in 14 days in the US. Last time we talked, on Saturday, I told you we'd gone from a daily new-case average of just over 11,000 to more than 30,000 in less than a month. Well, it's now been just about a month since that 11,000 figure, and we're now to almost 38,000. We're getting pretty out of control in many, many places. We still have five clusters around the country—more on those later. For a long while, even as cases increased, deaths stayed low; they're still low, relatively speaking, but the rate of increase over two weeks has been 42 percent, and that's not nothing. Hospitalizations are on the rise too by about 46 percent in the same period. Only thing declining is testing, which is, of course, the last thing we should be pulling back on.

Today, the CDC's ensemble forecast is out for the week, and we're seeing the projection increase again after a long lull. Current prediction is for up to 625,000 deaths by August 14. The forecast is also projecting an increase in hospitalizations, another number that's been on the decline for months.

On July 21, 2020, one year ago today, the US had 3,908,800 reported cases and 141,945 reported deaths. States were still setting records. The summer surge was in full swing with hospitals filled to capacity, primarily in the South, and deaths increasing. The FDA granted emergency use authorization (EUA) for pool testing; this is the method whereby several patients' specimens are pooled and tested together. Only pools with a positive result need to have the specimens individually tested, which reduces the number of tests needed. This was used as a means for stretching scarce test kits because this deep into the pandemic we were still short of testing capacity; the turnaround time was running as long as two weeks. We were learning older children are as able to transmit this virus as adults. We were talking about vaccine candidates moving into late-stage testing and regarding that whole process with a great deal of hope. We believed an effective vaccine would deliver us from this mess; now we have three effective vaccines, and it turns out they weren't enough because too few of us cared enough to receive them. Of course, we could have seen that coming, but I don't think we realized—at least I didn't—how disheartening that would be when it happened. And none of us foresaw Delta.

Worldwide, there had been 14,735,331 cases and 610,654 deaths reported a year ago. After the US, which has led since early on, countries with the most cases were Brazil, India, Russia, South Africa, Peru, Mexico, Chile, the UK, and Iran. We were seeing surges on every continent except for Antarctica.

I mentioned this a few days ago, but there have still been questions about whether B.1.617.2 or Delta, the variant first identified in India, is worse in younger people than the earlier variants have been. I cannot find any research that supports that conclusion; but I am hearing a lot from the folks on the ground in states with big outbreaks that their patients are younger and sicker than before, specifically that young people—in their 20s and 30s—are coming in sicker than ever before. Maybe this is simply because they're not coming in soon enough, but there are a lot of scientists and physicians who are speculating that this variant is doing more damage faster in younger people—that it is, indeed, worse. They report seeing more sick children as well.

An example of this is a report I read from Mississippi. Mississippi is the least-vaccinated state or territory in the US. On Sunday, the state had seven children in ICUs, two of them receiving mechanical ventilation. I don't think Mississippi has had that many children in ICUs throughout the pandemic. Further, state health official, Dr. Thomas Dobbs, tweeted last week that "Pretty much ALL" reported cases are Delta, and "a vast majority" of the hospitalized and dying are unvaccinated. No big surprise there. Children under 12 are

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not eligible for vaccination; they rely on the older members of the population to protect them by interrupting transmission through vaccination. The older members are failing them in this. Only 47 percent of the population, including just six percent of eligible 12- to 15-year-olds in Mississippi, are fully vaccinated.

And Dr. Catherine O'Neal, infectious disease specialist at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, described the situation there this way to KCTV5: "This year's virus is not last year's virus. It's attacking our 40-year-olds. It's attacking our parents and young grandparents. And it's getting our kids." She reports they are seeing more previously-healthy patients in their 20s than ever before. Ninety-seven percent of those cases are unvaccinated, according to Louisiana's governor, John Bel Edwards.

Next state in real trouble is Alabama. As of today, they're seeing over 1000 new case per day; that's a 730 percent increase in just two weeks. Some spots in the state are worse than others, for example, Mobile, with its 25 percent vaccination rate, is soaring. The vaccination rate in the state overall is 34 percent, so this isn't getting better any time soon.

Delta took over as the dominant variant in the US, accounting for 50 percent of new cases, early this month—that is, two to three weeks ago. It now accounts for 83 percent of new cases, more than that in some regions, especially where vaccination rates are low. What we're seeing here with this rapid growth is pretty clearly a consequence of its ridiculous transmissibility.

The FDA has granted priority review to Pfizer and BioNTech's Biologic License Application; this is the request for full approval of their vaccine, taking it off emergency status. The companies have been feeding data to the agency since spring and last month made formal application; the target date for a decision is January, but this priority review process should shave a fair amount of time off the wait. An agency official, speaking off the record to CNN, indicated there should be a decision inside two months; that would put us in late September.

Ahead of Friday's opening ceremonies, there have been some cases popping up in officials and athletes planning to participate in the 2020 Olympic Games in Japan. I think all concerned recognized there were going to be positive tests even before Delta reared its ugly head; we're simply seeing the fallout from that begin. There are different protocols for individuals who have and have not been fully vaccinated in the case of a positive test or a known exposure, and some sports compete later than others; so some of the people now on protocols may still be able to participate. We knew this was going to be messy. I am simply hoping the virus can be contained. Japan doesn't need anything to worsen its current situation, and the countries to which these folks will return when the Games are over don't need sparks to tinder either.

As Delta settles in for the duration (or at least until an even-worse variant takes over), we are seeing recommendations for masking even for vaccinated people in some settings. We know unvaccinated people should be masking whenever they're outside their homes in any situation where they are physically close, even momentarily, to people who are not in their households, but the rules have been different for the fully vaccinated, and they're changing for all of us now that we understand how serious a transmission risk Delta presents. So what are the new best practices for those of us who are vaccinated? They're going to depend on your personal risk factors and your household risk factors. Here are some things to consider:

—If you are immunocompromised, you may not have responded fully (or at all) to your vaccination; you are at risk any time you are in the presence of unvaccinated people. In any situation where there may be unvaccinated persons present, wear a mask, distance, and limit your exposure time.

—If members of your household are immunocompromised or unvaccinated children, you are not highly likely to become infected and transmit it, but the probability is not zero. You will likely be well off to wear

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a mask in crowded indoor settings.

—If your community/region has a high vaccination rate (80 percent or so), then likely community transmission is not significant. That makes your risk of acquiring and/or transmitting infection quite low. You're probably fine without a mask in most or all situations.

—If your community/region has a high caseload (which probably means vaccination rates are low too), then your risk of becoming infected rises. Remember that these vaccines are excellent—better really, but they're not 100 percent protective against infection, severe disease, or death. Remember also that your risk is cumulative, so any combination of closer contact, longer duration, frequency of exposure, and Delta variant is going to ramp up the probability you can acquire the virus whether you're vaccinated or not. The risk in any individual rises as transmission rates rise, so there are circumstances in which taking precautions makes sense. If fewer than 30 percent of adults are vaccinated in your area and Delta is increasing, then I recommend you exercise most of the precautions you should have been—and hopefully were—exercising last winter.

Here, I have an admittedly limited data set to present: Of 18,000 Americans who died from Covid-19 in May, 150 were fully vaccinated. That's 0.8 percent. From late January to mid-July, 18 vaccinated out of 2471 Virginians, 0.8 percent, died from Covid-19. From the first of the year to the end of June, 71 vaccinated out of 37,180 California residents, 0.2 percent, died from Covid-19. And in Maryland, 0 vaccinated out of 130 residents of Maryland died from the virus. Is there anyone who thinks this is a coincidence? I didn't think so.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) came out Monday with its recommendations for opening schools this fall, and frankly, they look a whole lot like those posted on the CDC's website a few days ago. The big difference is that the AAP is recommending universal masking for everyone except those with medical or developmental conditions that complicate masking. The primary reason for the recommendation centers on the difficulty of determining who is and is not vaccinated; concerns about low-vaccination communities apparently played into this as well. The guidance did not recommend vaccine be required, but they did say, "It may become necessary for schools . . . to require Covid-19 vaccination for in-person learning." Of course, we know these recommendations are simply a fantasy for much of the country, just as the CDC guidance is. Where states have not forbidden the application of common-sense transmission mitigation measures it seems unlikely communities will stand for them. Now that we've discovered we're pretty willing to sacrifice tens of thousands of Americans, irrespective of their willingness to serve in this role, for our freedom, I don't think the appetite for unfettered liberty's going anywhere.

That's it for the day. Stay well. We'll talk in a few days.

## **Rounds Statement on Committee Approval of National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)**

WASHINGTON – Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, released the following statement on the Armed Services Committee’s passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022.

“The national defense bill is a prime example of Congress putting politics aside and achieving results for our service members and their families,” said Rounds. “As the Ranking Member of the Cybersecurity Subcommittee, I am proud of our work to strengthen our nation’s cyber capabilities and develop advanced technology to combat threats from China and Russia. Additionally, this year’s NDAA provides 3 percent real growth in funding for our Armed Forces at a time of serious and mounting threats from foreign adversaries. I am pleased our bill contains measures supporting South Dakotans, including the Airmen at Ellsworth Air Force Base. These included provisions support Cold Spray repair technology, stratospheric balloon research, a cybersecurity related university consortium and the B-21 bomber program. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move this legislation across the finish line.”

“Senator Rounds is an integral part of the Senate Armed Services Committee,” said Ranking Member Jim Inhofe. “His outstanding leadership on the Cybersecurity Subcommittee will strengthen the cybersecurity posture of the Department of Defense — ensuring we can better defend ourselves against malicious cyberattacks. Senator Rounds also worked tirelessly to strengthen military readiness and to deliver the resources, equipment, training, and care our service members and their families deeply deserve. I’m grateful for his hard work on this year’s defense authorization bill.”

Highlights of the National Defense Authorization Act include:

Gives our military the resources needed to deter our enemies: Increases funding for national defense by \$25 billion above President Biden’s request, matching the National Defense Strategy Commission minimum recommendation of 3 percent real growth.

Takes care of our service members: Makes certain our service members receive a 2.7 percent pay raise; makes necessary improvements to military health care; continues efforts to guarantee military spouses have access to meaningful employment; and ensures military families have access to high-quality housing.

Prioritizes cybersecurity: Protects against persistent cyberattacks by assessing and strengthening both offensive and defensive capabilities.

Accelerates innovation: Invests in defense technology that will put us ahead of our competitors.

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## West Nile Update – South Dakota, 22 July 2021

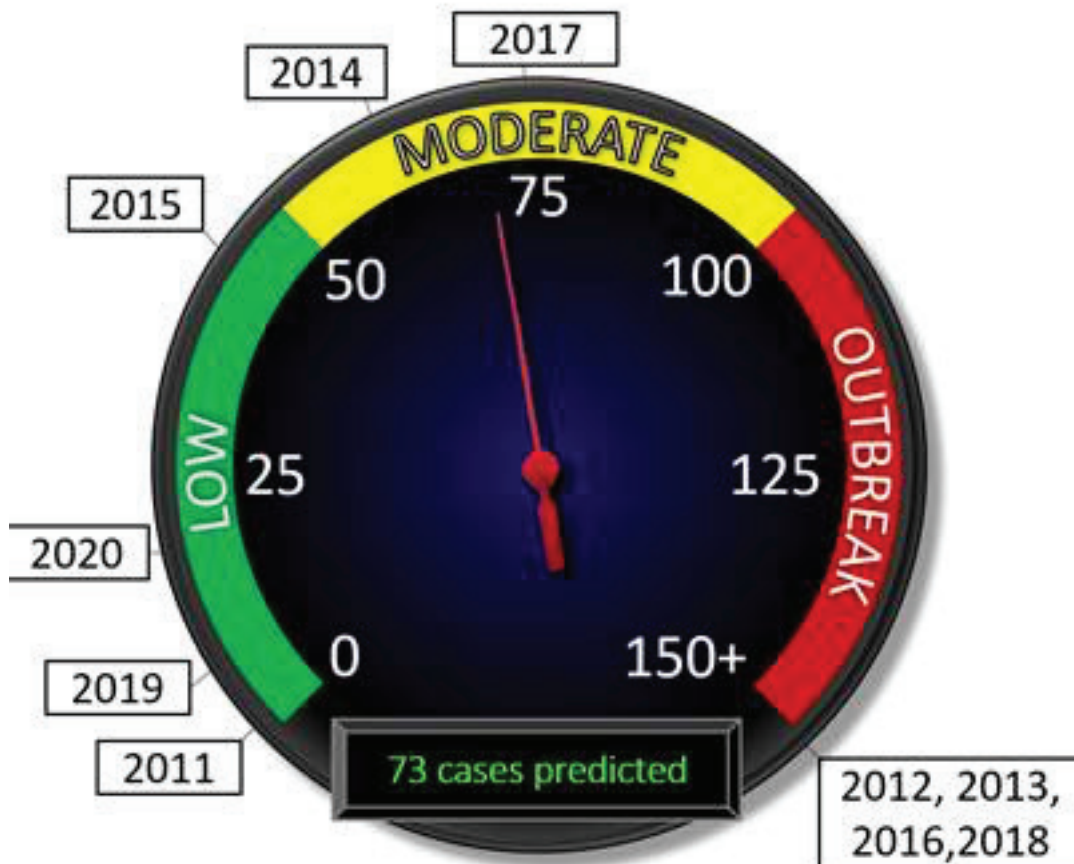
The first human WNV case has been reported in Walworth county. The West Nile virus positive mosquito pools have been detected this year in Brookings, Codington, Hughes, and Lincoln counties.

SD WNV (as of July 21): 1 human case reported (Walworth)

4 counties with positive mosquito pools (Brookings, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln)

US WNV (as of July 13): 11 cases (AR, AZ, IA, ND, TX) and 1 death

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2021, South Dakota (as of July 19)





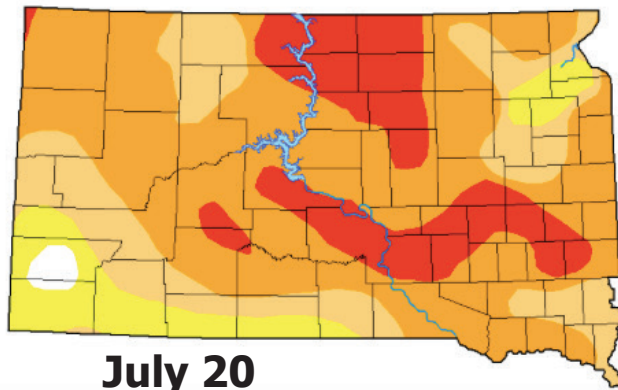
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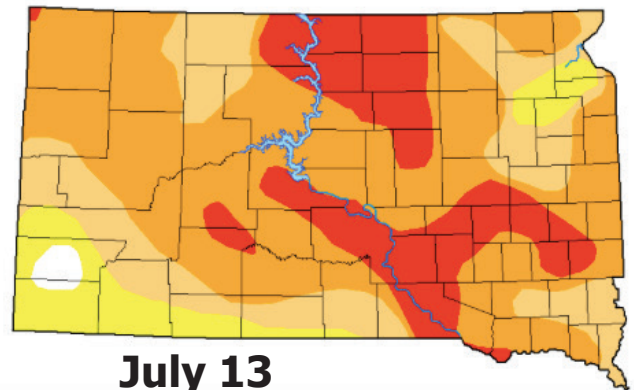
## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



July 20



July 13

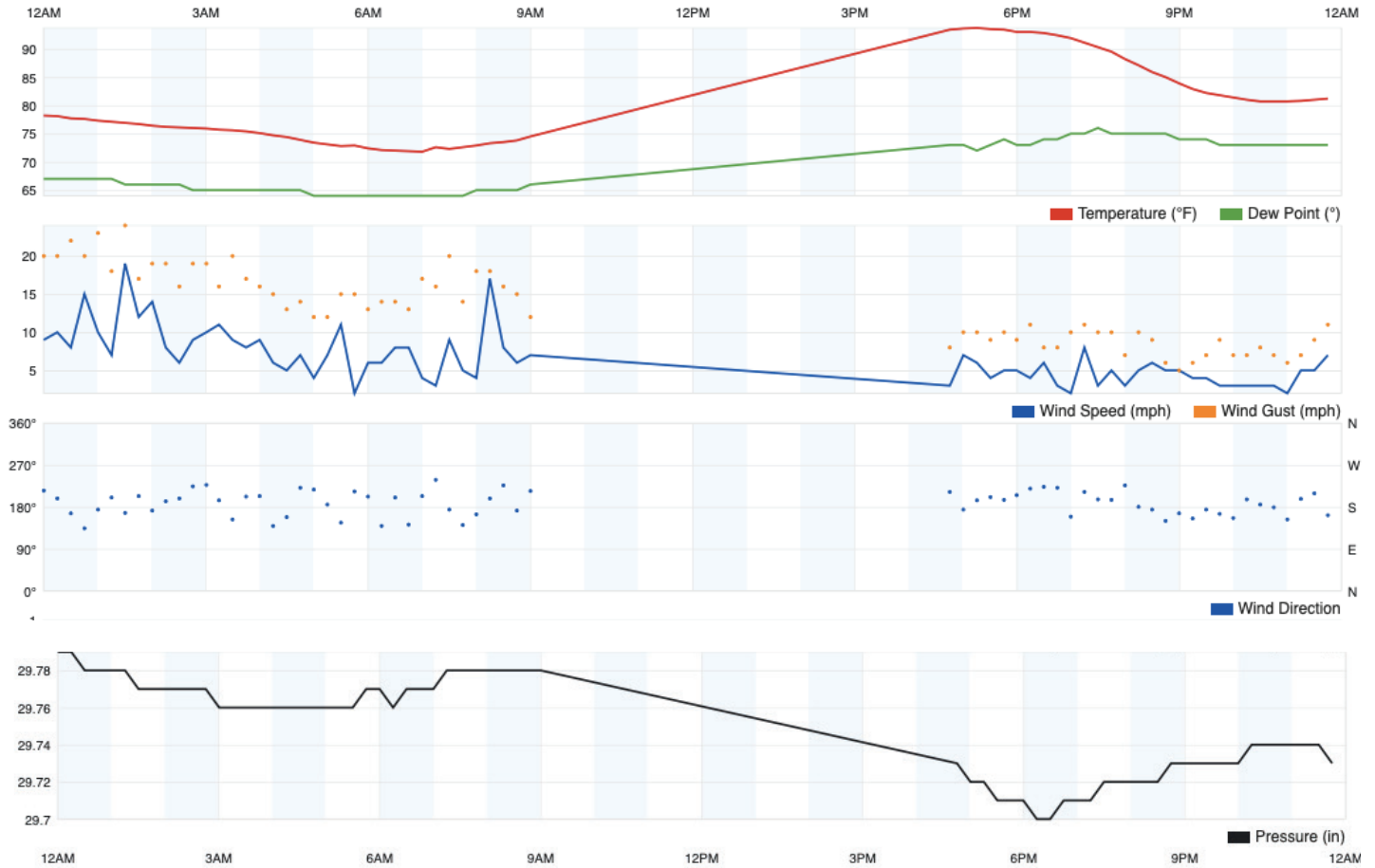
## High Plains

Scattered showers largely ended early in the drought-monitoring period. Meanwhile, extreme heat returned across northern portions of the region. Agricultural drought impacts across the northern High Plains remained widespread and severe, despite spotty showers. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, topsoil moisture on July 18 was rated 86% very short to short in North Dakota, along with 84% in South Dakota and 74% in Wyoming. Rangeland and pastures were rated at least one-half very poor to poor in Wyoming and the Dakotas, led by South Dakota at 78%. On July 18, North Dakota was the national leader in oats rated very poor to poor (50%; tied with South Dakota), along with soybeans (41%) and corn (32%). South Dakota led the nation, among major production states, in sorghum rated very poor to poor (29%). Nationally, the U.S. spring wheat crop was rated just 11% good to excellent and 63% very poor to poor on July 18, the lowest overall condition at this time of year since July 18, 1988, when the crop was categorized as 7% good to excellent and 73% very poor to poor. Initial estimates released by USDA on July 12 indicated that the 2021 U.S. spring wheat production will be down 41% from last year, while yield will be down 37%. If realized, the 2021 U.S. spring wheat yield of 30.7 bushels per acre would be the lowest since 2002.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Sunny	Clear	Hot
High: 92 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 90 °F

## Strong to Severe Thunderstorms Possible

Threat area this afternoon into the evening hours.

### WHAT

Severe thunderstorms with large hail and damaging winds possible.

### WHERE

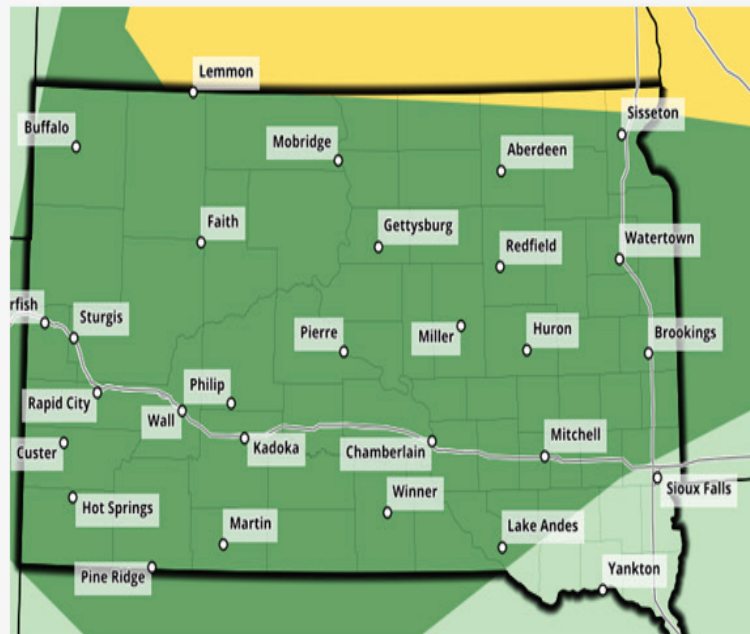
Primarily across northeastern South Dakota and Western Minnesota.

### WHEN

This afternoon into the evening hours.  
The highest risk period will be from 4 pm – 9 pm.

### ACTION

Monitor the weather and have a plan of action if severe weather strikes your area.



MARGINAL	SLIGHT	ENHANCED	MODERATE
Isolated Severe Storms Possible	Scattered Severe Storms Possible	Numerous Severe Storms Possible	Widespread Severe Storms Likely

 **NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE**  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
Updated: 7/23/2021 5:29 AM Central

Isolated showers and thunderstorms this morning will give way to hot and humid conditions this afternoon. Thunderstorms will redevelop later this afternoon into the evening hours. Some of these storms could become severe with hail and damaging winds the primary threats.

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## Today in Weather History

July 23, 2007: High heat indices along with very little wind contributed to the deaths of over 2800 cattle in Brown, Spink, Day, and Marshall Counties. Most of the cattle deaths occurred on July 23rd. The high heat indices continued through the 25th with some more cattle deaths, but protective measures kept the death count down. Most of the cattle that died were on feedlots. The total loss was around 3 million dollars.

July 23, 2010: A United States record setting hailstone fell from a powerful supercell thunderstorm moving southeast across central South Dakota. The record setting hailstone fell near Vivian, South Dakota and measured 8 inches in diameter, 18.625 inches in circumference, and weighed 1.9375 pounds. This hailstone broke the previous United States record for diameter (7.0 inches - 22 June 2003 in Aurora, NE) and weight (1.67 pounds - 3 September 1970 in Coffeyville, KS). The Aurora, Nebraska hailstone will retain the record for circumference (18.75 inches). Several other stones of 6 inches or more in diameter were measured during the storm survey.

Along with the huge hail, damaging winds more than 70 mph along with an isolated tornado occurred. The large hail and high winds caused extensive damage to homes, outbuildings, and vehicles as it moved southeast across the region. Some of the hail went entirely through car windshields, roofs, garages, and campers. The hail caused five minor injuries to motorists on Interstate 90 as it went through their windshields. A child was severely injured when the large hail completely shattered the glass in the mini-van he was traveling. The child suffered numerous cuts, many requiring stitches. Click [HERE](#) for more information from NOAA.

1788: Called the George Washington's Hurricane, this storm originated near Bermuda on the 19th before making landfall in Virginia. It passed directly over the Lower Chesapeake Bay and Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington. This track is very similar to the path of the Chesapeake-Potomac hurricane of 1933. At Norfolk, winds increased at 5 p.m. on the 23rd with the wind originating from the northeast. At 12:30 a.m., the wind suddenly shifted to the south and "blew a perfect hurricane, tearing down chimneys, fences"...some corn was also leveled. Also, large trees were uprooted, and houses were moved from their foundations.

Port Royal and Hobb's Hole experienced a violent northeast gale which drove several vessels ashore. In Fredricksburg, vast quantities of corn, tobacco, and fruit were destroyed. Houses and trees fell in significant numbers across Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond, and Westmoreland counties. Crops were destroyed, and many livestock perished in Lower Mathews County. Many plantations saw their houses leveled. Homes were flooded with water six feet deep, and several inhabitants drowned.

Historical figures of the time logged the storm's antics. George Washington noted the sinking of the small ship Federalist and uprooted trees. Colonel James Madison, the father of the future president, experienced the passing of great winds and rains near Orange. In Alexandria, damage to wheat, tobacco, and corn was "beyond description." The information above is from the Weather Prediction Center and noted American historian David Ludlum.

2011: Chicago set an all-time daily record rainfall when 6.86 inches fell during the early morning hours of Saturday, July 23, 2011, at O'Hare airport. The previous daily record was 6.64 inches set on September 13, 2008.

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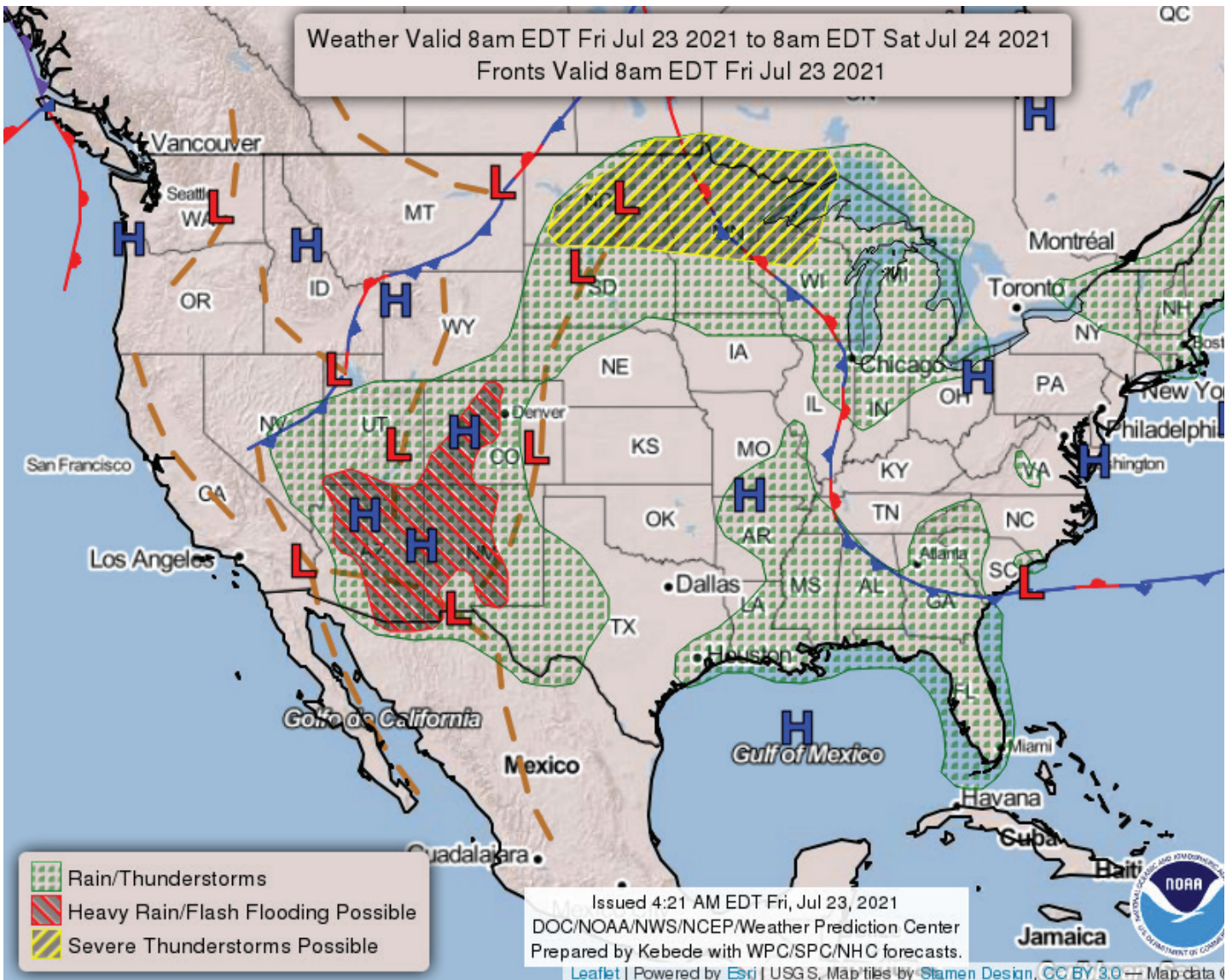
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 94 °F at 4:54 PM**  
**Low Temp: 72 °F at 6:46 AM**  
**Wind: 24 mph at 1:29 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 109° in 1941**  
**Record Low: 41° in 1904**  
**Average High: 85°F**  
**Average Low: 60°F**  
**Average Precip in July.: 2.36**  
**Precip to date in July.: 1.73**  
**Average Precip to date: 13.37**  
**Precip Year to Date: 6.48**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:12 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:09 a.m.**



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## TRAVELING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

G.K. Chesterton was a famous English writer. He is held in high esteem for his poetry, respected for his work as a journalist and his writings in the field of philosophy. He was once named by Time magazine as a "man of colossal genius."

Once, while traveling on a train, he became so engrossed in the book he was reading that he forgot his destination. As the train made its last stop, the conductor went to him and said, "Sir, this is the end of the line."

He frantically searched his pockets for his ticket but could not find it. Not being able to find it, he looked bewildered and confused. Sensing his predicament, the conductor asked, "Where were you going?"

After a lengthy pause, he said to the conductor, "I can't remember. I'll have to phone my wife and ask her."

The writer of Psalm 80 recognized that the children of Israel had abandoned their relationship with God. With a heavy heart, he prayed, "Restore us, O God, make Your face shine upon us that we may be saved." Realizing that they were going in the wrong direction, he asked God to "restore them, turn them around and save them." And He did!

Throughout history, from the dawn of Creation until this very moment, God has never abandoned anyone. It is always the other way around: we abandon Him.

A mother received a letter from her son in prison. In his despair he wrote her and said that he got into trouble because God had abandoned him. With a heart filled with love and sadness for him and his situation, she wrote, "Son, if you do not feel the closeness of God, it is because you have left Him."

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for Your promise that You will never leave us nor forsake us – no matter what! May we find You and follow You – faithfully! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:3

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## 2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)  
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)  
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS  
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.  
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament  
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon  
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament  
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament  
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament  
08/28/2021 Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

## News from the Associated Press

### **The Latest: Australia state declares emergency over COVID-19**

By The Associated Press undefined

SYDNEY — An Australian state government on Friday declared an emergency due to a COVID-19 outbreak in Sydney.

The New South Wales state government reported one fatality and 136 new infections in the latest 24-hour period, the biggest daily tally of new cases since the outbreak began in mid June.

State Premier Gladys Berejiklian called on the federal government to provide more vaccines for the worst-affected suburbs in Sydney's west and south.

Sydney has been locked down for a month. The delta variant cluster has spread from Sydney to Victoria and South Australia states which are also locked down. Half Australia's population of 26 million is currently locked down.

Only 15% of adult Australians are fully vaccinated. While there are ample supplies of locally-manufactured AstraZeneca, many are concerned about the slight risk of blood clots associated with that vaccine and a demanding Pfizer, the only alternative registered in Australia.

#### MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- White House: Vaccinations rise in hard-hit virus states
- EU donating 200M doses of coronavirus vaccines to poorer nations
- Tokyo's new virus cases near 2,000, day before Olympics open
- China rebuffs WHO's terms for further COVID-19 origins study

Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

#### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea says it'll extend the toughest distancing rules imposed on the greater Seoul area for another two weeks, as it's battling its worst coronavirus outbreak.

South Korea on Friday reported 1,630 new virus cases, marking a 17th straight day its daily caseload is above 1,000. About 70% of the recent cases have been detected in the Seoul area, where about half of South Korea's 52 million people reside.

Interior and Safety Minister Jeon Hae-cheol says it's inevitable that social gatherings and travel are restricted to suppress a widespread domestic outbreak linked to a variety of sources in daily lives.

The current government-imposed rules ban gatherings of three or more people after 6 p.m. and require high-risk facilities such as nightclubs to suspend operations. Weddings and funerals can be attended by only relatives, but capped at 49 people. Those rules were to expire on Sunday, but the government will implement similar restrictions two more weeks. From next Monday, the government says that non-relatives can attend weddings or funerals but the 49-person cap will still be maintained.

South Korea's total caseload stands at 185,733, with 2,066 deaths from COVID-19.

CHICAGO — Chicago Public Schools has announced its students, teachers and staff will be required to wear masks indoors when they return to classrooms in August.

In a letter to parents Thursday, Chief Executive Officer José Torres said the policy is based on feedback from local, state and federal public health experts and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Visitors to school buildings will be required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status. Torres says the masks can be removed while eating or drinking and while students are engaged with in outdoor activities.

Pediatricians recently said everyone older than 2 should wear a mask in schools, regardless of vaccina-



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tion status.

However, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said earlier this month fully vaccinated students, teachers and staff don't need face coverings inside classrooms.

**JUNEAU, Alaska** — Officials in Juneau plan to impose restrictions aimed at curbing rising COVID-19 cases. The new measures are set to take effect Friday and include limiting capacity at gyms and indoor service at bars to 50%. Indoor gatherings will be limited to 50 people with masks required, unless a COVID-19 mitigation plan has been approved by emergency operations leaders or everyone is fully vaccinated.

Officials also are recommending restaurants reduce capacity to ensure distancing between dining parties. The city is poised to welcome the first large cruise ship of the season on Friday. State health department figures show about 74% of Juneau residents 12 or older are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

**TOPEKA, Kan.** — Gov. Laura Kelly is pinning Kansas' hopes of keeping the COVID-19 delta variant in check on more people getting inoculated because it is spreading rapidly among the unvaccinated.

Kelly acknowledged Thursday that there's not enough time before K-12 schools resume classes in mid-August to get all students ages 12 and older fully vaccinated. But she added that the state will focus on giving at least the first of two doses to as many as of them as possible.

She called more vaccinations the only thing that's going to stop the fast-spreading delta variant. The number of confirmed delta variant cases in Kansas has tripled this month, to more than 1,100.

**LANSING, Mich.** — The Justice Department said Thursday it will not open a civil rights investigation related to COVID-19 deaths in Michigan's nursing homes.

The notification to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer came nearly 11 months after the department's Civil Rights Division during the Trump administration requested data from the Democratic governors of four states, including Michigan, and said it was considering whether to investigate under a federal law that protects the rights of people in public nursing homes. Most nursing homes are privately owned.

"We appreciate your cooperation with this matter," Stephen Rosenbaum, chief of the special litigation section within the Civil Rights Division, wrote to Mark Totten, Whitmer's chief lawyer.

Confronted with surging hospitalizations early in the pandemic, Michigan addressed the discharge of coronavirus patients no longer needing acute care but still in quarantine.

Whitmer ordered that nursing homes not prohibit the admission or readmission of residents based on COVID-19 testing results. Her office told the Justice Department, however, that the policy never went into effect because the state health department did not issue necessary guidance due to nursing homes' concerns.

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** -- New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and the state's top health officials are closely monitoring the increase in COVID-19 cases.

The state Health Department reported Thursday that another 273 cases have been confirmed, marking one of the highest daily totals in months. That topped the 271 cases reported the day before.

The governor's office said the numbers aren't where anyone wants them to be. Many states are seeing similar upticks. There are no indications yet whether any public health restriction could be reinstated in New Mexico.

After dealing with some of the toughest restriction in the nation, New Mexico reopened July 1.

**CORUNNA, Michigan** — Elected officials in a Michigan county gave themselves \$65,000 in bonuses with federal relief money related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The money, described as "hazard pay," included \$25,000 for Jeremy Root, chairman of the Shiawassee County Board of Commissioners.

The mostly rural county, between Lansing and Flint, has a population of 68,000.

Commissioners — all Republicans — last week voted to award more than \$500,000 to dozens of county employees. It ranged from \$25,000 for administrators to \$2,000 for cleaning staff. All recipients got at

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least \$1,000.

Besides Root, commissioners John Plowman and Brandon Marks each received \$10,000, and the other four commissioners got \$5,000 each.

Most commissioners are paid \$10,000 a year for their part-time job, plus a stipend for meetings.

"I think that I earned it," Commissioner Cindy Garber said of the bonus. "I work really hard at this job. I was here in-person all through this crazy year."

Commissioner Marlene Webster said she was "mortified" when money appeared in her bank account and didn't know she had voted to reward herself.

A message seeking comment from Root wasn't immediately returned Thursday.

**WASHINGTON** -- Federal health officials signaled Thursday they're hunting ways to quickly learn if a third COVID-19 vaccine dose might better protect organ transplant recipients and other patients with weak immune systems.

While the vaccines are strongly effective in most people, many Americans with immune-suppressing health problems remain in limbo after immunization, uncertain how protected they really are. France and Israel already have begun offering an extra dose to transplant recipients and other immunocompromised people. In the U.S., those patients increasingly are pushing for -- even lying to get -- another shot, too.

Thursday, advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed some small studies that hint, but don't prove, a third dose might help at least some immunocompromised patients. The panel can't formally recommend an extra dose without Food and Drug Administration permission, but several advisers asked if the government could allow worried patients to sign up for one as part of a study.

"We are actively looking into ways that could be done," replied CDC's Dr. Amanda Cohn. "Stay tuned. We are working through those issues."

**RALEIGH, N.C.** --- The North Carolina Healthcare Association announced on Thursday that several of the state's largest hospital systems will require employees to get a COVID-19 vaccine in order to continue working at their facilities.

The sites that will soon mandate vaccinations for workers include Duke University Health network and several UNC Health hospitals.

Other hospital systems that will compel staff to get the vaccine will include Charlotte-based Atrium Health, Greensboro-based Cone Health, Wake Forest Baptist Health and Winston-Salem based Novant Health.

"Hospital and health system employee vaccination against COVID-19 is vital to safely care for patients by protecting them from infection, and to mitigate the spread of the virus within healthcare facilities and among clinicians, patients and their families and friends," the group wrote in a message to its 130 members.

The move comes as North Carolina decided on Wednesday to eliminate its statewide mask starting on July 30. The state has seen a surge in cases and hospitalizations fueled by the more lethal delta variant.

**NEW YORK** — Government advisers got their first close look at reports of a rare neurological reaction following the J&J vaccine and agreed the vaccine's benefits far outweigh the risks.

The panel decided not to change its current endorsement of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. But at the same time, it urged officials to do more to make the public aware of reported side effects.

Last week, U.S. regulators last week added a new warning to J&J's COVID-19 vaccine about links to Guillain-Barre syndrome, an immune system disorder that can cause muscle weakness and occasionally paralysis.

Federal officials said they had received 100 reports of the problem in people who had gotten the vaccine, during a period when more than 12 million doses of the vaccine were given. The rare reaction has also been linked to other vaccines, and it has also been tied to viral infections, including by the coronavirus itself.

Panel members said they feel the J&J vaccine should still be recommended, especially given a current surge in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths that has been linked to a newer variant of the coronavirus.

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But some panel members also expressed concerns about a vaccine that also has been linked to rare but unusual blood clots in veins that drain blood from the brain, and in people with abnormally low levels of clot-forming platelets.

"I am concerned that these risks... are not benign," and there may be some places where patients are not easily able to get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, said Dr. Pablo Sanchez, a professor of pediatrics at Ohio State University.

**WASHINGTON** — The White House says there's been no decision to change the COVID-19 guidance on wearing face masks.

Press secretary Jen Psaki insisted Thursday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and not the White House, makes the decisions about public health. Psaki says any change in the guidance would come from CDC.

The current guidance is that fully vaccinated individuals do not need to wear face masks while those who are unvaccinated should continue to wear them.

White House and public health officials have been discussing whether to update the mask guidance because of the surge in COVID-19 infections blamed on the highly contagious delta variant.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said at a briefing Thursday that, while her agency is always reviewing the data, the recommendations haven't changed.

**MADISON, Wis.** — Wisconsin health officials say they're expecting to see more COVID-19 cases as a result of big gatherings by fans of the Milwaukee Bucks.

Police estimated as many as 100,000 people, few of them masked, crowded into the "Deer District" area outside the Bucks' arena on Tuesday as the team beat Phoenix to win the NBA championship. The city of Milwaukee hosted a parade on Thursday for the champions, with thousands lining downtown streets and the area near the arena.

Julie Willems Van Dijk, deputy secretary of the state Department of Health Services, predicted the two large gatherings would lead to more COVID-19 cases.

City officials in Milwaukee said they suggested that unvaccinated people mask up.

COVID-19 cases in both Wisconsin and Milwaukee County are not nearly as high as a year ago, but they have risen in recent weeks. Daily cases in Milwaukee County, where about 46% of residents have been fully vaccinated, have tripled in the past couple of weeks to about 80 a day.

**SIOUX FALLS, S.D.**— A dominant health system in the Dakotas that is also one of the largest health organizations in the country said Thursday it is making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all its employees, citing the spread of more contagious variants of the virus.

Sanford Health is requiring all workers to get shots by Nov. 1. More than 90% of clinicians and 70% of nurses in the organization are already fully vaccinated, system officials said.

"This is the right thing to do for our patients and residents, people and communities," said Bill Gassen, Sanford president and CEO. "As more contagious COVID-19 variants continue to spread and threaten our communities, we must do everything we can to protect each other and our loved ones."

Sanford has 46 hospitals, 1,500 physicians and more than 200 Good Samaritan Society senior care locations in 26 states and 10 countries. It is based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota with additional major medical centers in Fargo and Bismarck, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Minnesota.

**ROME** — With daily COVID-19 cases sharply rising again, Italy will soon require people to have received at least one vaccine dose, have recovered from the illness in the last six months or have proof of a negative test performed in the last 48 hours to access venues like gyms, museums and indoor restaurants in a bid to avoid a return to pandemic lockdowns devastating for the economy.

The Italian government at a Cabinet meeting Thursday approved the measure requiring the certifica-

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tion, which is known as a "green pass." Starting on Aug. 6, people must have a "green pass" to let dine at tables inside restaurants or cafes, go to movies, sports events, casinos, town fairs or other leisure venues.

Premier Mario Draghi told reporters "green pass" use is needed to "keep economic activity open." Disappointing dance aficionados, however, the government didn't allow discos to re-open, as many had hoped it would. Impromptu street celebrations by thousands of fans, after Italy won the Euro2020 soccer championship earlier this month has helped fuel an uptick in new infections.

PHOENIX — One of Arizona's biggest hospital systems is renewing a call for people to get vaccinated, citing an increase in seriously ill COVID-19 patients in just a few weeks.

Dr. Michael White, of Valleywise Health, said those hospitalized are "predominantly those that have chosen not to be vaccinated for whatever reason."

He says doctors were mostly treating people with moderate symptoms, but things changed two weeks ago. Now, patients are coming in acutely ill.

Valleywise is also discussing mandating its roughly 4,800 employees and 1,500 contracted workers be vaccinated. Arizona on Thursday reported 1,174 newly confirmed cases and 10 deaths.

HONOLULU — With less than two weeks before the start of a new school year, Hawaii's Department of Education has posted a list of about 100 schools that will offer distance learning. Hawaii public school students return to classes Aug. 3.

Offering online instruction is a shift from last month, when Superintendent Christina Kishimoto said there would be no full distance-learning options.

The options come as Hawaii sees a rise in COVID-19 cases. Distance learning spots are limited. Students at schools that aren't on the list may apply for geographic exceptions to participate in a different school's online program.

## Dakotas health system makes COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A dominant health system in the Dakotas that bills itself as one of the largest health organizations in the country said Thursday it is making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all its employees, citing the spread of more contagious variants.

Sanford Health is requiring all workers to get shots by Nov. 1. More than 90% of clinicians and 70% of nurses in the organization are already fully vaccinated, system officials said.

"This is the right thing to do for our patients and residents, people and communities," said Bill Gassen, Sanford president and CEO. "As more contagious COVID-19 variants continue to spread and threaten our communities, we must do everything we can to protect each other and our loved ones."

The American Hospital Association on Wednesday announced its support of hospitals and health systems that implement mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for healthcare workers.

Sanford has 46 hospitals, 1,500 physicians and more than 200 Good Samaritan Society senior care locations in 26 states and 10 countries. It is based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and has major medical centers in Fargo and Bismarck, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Minnesota.

Dr. Doug Griffin, Sanford vice president and medical officer in Fargo, said a final decision hasn't been made on the possibility of furloughs for those who refuse the vaccine but said "they would not be working." He said the deadline gives employees "plenty of time" to get the shots and many of those who haven't been vaccinated were likely waiting for a mandate.

Sanford employees are already required to have several other vaccines, including annual flu shots that also need to be completed by Nov. 1. As with all vaccines, the hospital will allow certain exemptions for medical or religious reasons when it comes to the coronavirus shot.

"Nearly all new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are among unvaccinated people, and the overwhelming data confirms that the vaccines are not only safe, but the best and most reliable way to

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prevent transmission of the virus," said Dr. Jeremy Cauwels, Sanford's chief physician.

North Dakota's virus immunization rates are among the lowest in the country; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that less than 40% of the state is fully vaccinated. Reproductive health doctors from around the state held a virtual town hall Wednesday in an effort to clear up misinformation about the effects of COVID-19 vaccines on fertility and pregnancy.

More than 53% of people in Minnesota and 46% of people in South Dakota are fully vaccinated, the CDC reports.

"We're far from where we need to be," Griffin said.

## Let's go bowling! Aberdeen event hails 'The Big Lebowski'

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota family enamoured with the 1998 film "The Big Lebowski" is putting on its own festival to celebrate the cult classic, albeit with a different name from the other celebrations.

The inaugural DudeFest is scheduled Saturday afternoon at The Village Bowl in Aberdeen, an idea that Tony Zerr and some of his family members have tossed around for a couple of years.

The Coen Brothers film stars Jeff Bridges as the main character, Jeffrey "The Dude" Lebowski. A ne'er-do-well who does little aside from bowling, his easy-going life is complicated when he's mistaken for a millionaire of the same name and the wealthier Lebowski's wife is kidnapped.

Lebowski Fests are common across the country but since that name is copyrighted, Zerr came up with a different moniker. But the idea is the same, the Aberdeen American News reported.

"We took the original Lebowski Fest idea where it's, 'Hey, come to a bowling alley, bowl, get drinks, dress up and have a good time,' but we did a lot more with it," Zerr said.

Activities include a showing of the film, a Persian rug raffle, a photoshoot, a band concert and various contests for prizes, such as for crappy car, costume and trivia.

## South Dakota court orders sharing of crash victim's records

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A judge overseeing the criminal trial of South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravensborg has ordered medical providers to turn over their health records for the pedestrian who was struck and killed by Ravensborg last year.

This week, retired Circuit Court Judge John Brown issued letters to several hospitals and clinics, ordering them to provide records about Joe Boever's psychiatric state. The order comes after Ravensborg's defense alleged in court documents that Boever's Sept. 12 death may have been a suicide.

Investigators say Ravensborg was distracted and swerved out of his lane when he was driving on Highway 14 near Highmore when he struck and killed Boever, a 55-year-old who was walking along the highway with a flashlight. Ravensborg faces three misdemeanor charges of careless driving, use of an electronic device while driving and illegal lane change.

Earlier this month, Ravensborg's attorneys filed a motion alleging that a pattern of alcoholism and prescription drug abuse by Boever that caused at least one family member, a cousin, to believe that a depressed Boever killed himself by jumping in front of Ravensborg's car.

According to the Argus Leader, Brown ordered five health care facilities to turn over Boever's psychiatric and psychology records. Brown sent letters Tuesday to the Human Services Center, the state's public psychiatry hospital in Yankton, as well as Avera St. Mary's Hospital in Pierre, Avera St. Luke's Hospital in Aberdeen, the Avera Medical Group and the Avera Medical Group Psychiatry.

All four of the Avera entities have filed claims against Boever's estate to receive payment for services they provided him. The claims do not indicate what services were provided. Avera did not respond to the Argus Leader's request for comment.

Ravnsborg told officials he never saw Boever and thought he struck a deer.

Hyde County Sheriff Mike Volek responded to the scene and let Ravensborg drive his car home to Pierre. Ravensborg said they didn't realize he hit and killed a person until he returned to the scene the next morning.

GOP Gov. Kristi Noem, three law enforcement organizations and some legislators have called on Ravens-

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borg, a Republican, to resign.

Each charge against the attorney general carries a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail. A trial is scheduled to begin Aug. 26.

## Noem to headline GOP event in early-voting South Carolina

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, possibly mulling a 2024 White House bid, is making her debut in South Carolina next month — an introductory step in the first Southern state to cast Republican-primary votes for president.

Noem will speak Aug. 23 at the “Faith & Freedom BBQ” in Anderson, the event’s host, U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan, told The Associated Press on Friday.

According to Duncan, who represents South Carolina’s 3rd District, the event is the state’s largest annual gathering of Republicans. In the past it has attracted speakers including then-Vice President Mike Pence, Sens. Ted Cruz and Joni Ernst, and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who also served in the Trump administration for two years as U.N. ambassador.

“Having served with Kristi Noem in Congress, I know first-hand that she is a fighter who believes government was created for the people, and that it shouldn’t run our lives,” Duncan told AP.

After four U.S. House terms, Noem in 2018 was elected governor, an office through which she moved to the forefront of state leaders across the country railing against government restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic.

Like others possibly in the field, Noem has downplayed the prospect. When asked publicly about any White House ambitions, she has said her focus is on her 2022 gubernatorial reelection campaign.

But other actions — such as registering a federal political action committee and hopscotching through the early-voting states — suggest otherwise as Noem tries to carve out her niche among an early crowd of possible GOP rivals for the White House.

Noem, 49, has recently visited both Iowa and New Hampshire, as have Haley, Pence and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Along with Pompeo, Florida Gov. Rick DeSantis and former President Donald Trump, she spoke at this year’s Conservative Political Action Conference, where she critiqued fellow Republican governors for pandemic policies such as mask mandates.

South Carolina has also seen its share of possible contender visits. Pompeo is set to headline a state GOP fundraiser this month. Pence chose the state as the site of his first public speech since leaving office. And Haley has made several appearances on her home turf — where she told AP she would not run if Trump entered the race — although her recent travel schedule has been focused on other states where she may not be as well-known.

“I am looking forward to joining Jeff and the commonsense conservatives at the Faith & Freedom BBQ,” Noem told AP. “Standing on conservative beliefs is more than rhetoric for me.”

While the event is a fundraiser, veterans, guardsmen, first responders and their families can obtain free tickets while they’re still available, Duncan’s office said.

## As Tokyo Games open, can Olympic flame burn away the funk?

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Disputed, locked down and running a year late, the Tokyo Games began at last Friday night, a multinational showcase of the finest athletes of a world fragmented by disease — and an event steeped in the political and medical baggage of a relentless pandemic whose presence haunts every Olympic corner.

As its opening ceremony unfolded in a nearly empty national stadium, devoid of any crowd energy, the first pandemic Games in a century convened amid opposition from much of the host nation. The trepidations have threatened to drown out the usual carefully packaged glitz and soaring rhetoric about sports and peace that are the Games’ hallmarks.

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Inside the stadium after dusk Friday, however, a carefully choreographed, made-for-TV ceremony sought to portray that the Games — and their spirit — are going on.

An ethereal blue light bathed the empty seats, and loud music muted the shouts of protesters outside screaming for the Games to be canceled — a widespread feeling here. Fireworks exploded in the sky above. A single stage held an octagon shape meant to resemble the country's fabled Mount Fuji.

Organizers held a moment of silence for those who had died of COVID; as it ticked off and the music paused, the sounds of protests echoed in the distance.

Their shouts raised a fundamental question about these Games as Japan, and large parts of the world, reel from the continuing gut punch of a pandemic that is stretching well into its second year, with cases in Tokyo approaching record highs this week: Will it be enough?

"It," in this case, is the product that's being packaged and sold, the commodity that has saved past Olympics when they've become mired in problems: the deep, intrinsic human attachment to the spectacle of sporting competition at the highest possible level.

Time and again, previous opening ceremonies have pulled off something that approaches magic. Scandals — bribery in Salt Lake City, censorship and pollution in Beijing, doping in Sochi — fade into the background when the sports begin.

But with people still falling ill and dying each day from the coronavirus, there's a particular urgency to the questions about whether the Olympic flame can burn away the fear or provide a measure of catharsis — and even awe — after a year of suffering and uncertainty in Japan and around the world.

As the sun set over the massive national stadium, a cool evening breeze tempered the blazing Tokyo heat. A stream of Olympics officials and journalists took up position, facing a cavernous space with a large field bearing the Olympics logo — and thousands of empty seats.

Outside the stadium, hundreds of curious Tokyo residents lined a barricade that separated them from those entering the stadium — but just barely: Some of those going in took selfies with the onlookers across the barricades, and there was an excited carnival feeling. Some pedestrians waved enthusiastically to approaching Olympic buses.

The sports have already begun — softball and soccer, for example — and some of the focus is turning toward the competition to come.

Can the U.S. women's soccer team, for instance, even after an early, shocking loss to Sweden, become the first to win an Olympics following a World Cup victory? Can Japan's Hideki Matsuyama win gold in golf after becoming the first Japanese player to win the Masters? Will Italy's Simona Quadarella challenge American standout Katie Ledecky in the 800- and 1,500-meter freestyle swimming races?

For now, however, it's hard to miss how unusual these Games promise to be. The lovely national stadium can seem like an isolated militarized zone, surrounded by huge barricades. Roads around it are sealed and businesses closed.

Inside, the feeling of sanitized, locked-down quarantine carries over. Fans, who would normally be screaming for their countries and mixing with people from around the world, have been banned, leaving only a carefully screened contingent of journalists, officials, athletes and participants.

Olympics often face opposition, but there's also usually a pervasive feeling of national pride. Japan's resentment centers on the belief that it was strong-armed into hosting — forced to pay billions and risk the health of a largely unvaccinated, deeply weary public — so the IOC can collect its billions in media revenue.

"Sometimes people ask why the Olympics exist, and there are at least two answers. One is they are a peerless global showcase of the human spirit as it pertains to sport, and the other is they are a peerless global showcase of the human spirit as it pertains to aristocrats getting luxurious hotel rooms and generous per diems," Bruce Arthur, a sports columnist for the Toronto Star, wrote recently.

How did we get here? A quick review of the past year and a half seems operatic in its twists and turns.

A once-in-a-century pandemic forces the postponement of the 2020 version of the Games. A fusillade of scandals (sexism and other discrimination and bribery claims, overspending, ineptitude, bullying) unfolds. People in Japan, meanwhile, watch bewildered as an Olympics considered a bad idea by many scientists actually takes shape.

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"We will continue to try to have this dialogue with the Japanese people knowing we will not succeed 100%. That would be putting the bar too high," said IOC President Thomas Bach. "But we're also confident that once the Japanese people see the Japanese athletes performing in these Olympic Games — hopefully successfully — that then the attitude will become less emotional."

Japanese athletes, freed from onerous travel rules and able to train more normally, may indeed enjoy a nice boost over their rivals in some cases, even without fans. Judo, a sport that Japan is traditionally a powerhouse in, will begin Saturday, giving the host nation a chance for early gold.

Still, while it's possible that "people may come out of the Olympics feeling good about themselves and about Japan having hosted the Games against all odds," Koichi Nakano, a political science professor at Sophia University in Tokyo, believes that such a scenario "is way too optimistic."

The reality, for now, is that the delta variant of the virus is still rising, straining the Japanese medical system in places, and raising fears of an avalanche of cases. Only a little over 20% of the population is fully vaccinated. And there have been near daily reports of positive virus cases within the so-called Olympic bubble that's meant to separate the Olympic participants from the worried, skeptical Japanese population.

For a night, at least, the glamor and message of hope of the opening ceremonies may distract many global viewers from the surrounding anguish and anger.

## **The Latest: Moment of silence held at Tokyo opening ceremony**

The Latest on the Tokyo Olympics, which are taking place under heavy restrictions after a year's delay because of the coronavirus pandemic:

Japan's Emperor Naruhito and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach have arrived for the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Games.

Naruhito attended the 1964 Tokyo Olympics as a 4-year-old, watching the marathon and equestrian events. Bach won a gold medal in fencing at the 1976 Montreal Games.

They were followed by a delegation chosen to carry the Japanese flag into the stadium, before the host nation's national anthem was performed by singer Misa.

Tributes were paid to those lost during the pandemic, and the Israeli delegation that was killed at the Munich Games in 1972. A moment of silence was offered inside the stadium.

With a blaze of indigo and white fireworks lighting the night sky, the Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony has started.

It began with a single female athlete at the center of the stadium, kneeling. As she stood, the shadow behind her took the shape of a seedling, growing as she walked. A number of athletes were featured in a video that started with the moment Tokyo won the Olympic bid in 2013, then eventually to images of a world silenced by the pandemic.

Then came the fireworks, a 20-second blast of light — as if to say these Olympics have finally emerged from dark times.

The International Olympic Committee has released the order of the parade of nations for the opening ceremony and the names of all the flagbearers.

Greece, per Olympic tradition, enters first. The host nation always enters last, so it'll likely take a couple hours or so before Japanese flagbearers Yui Susaki and Rui Hachimura lead their national contingent into the stadium.

The Refugee Olympic team goes second in the parade. The others are slotted by their order in the Japanese alphabet, so Iceland and Ireland precede Azerbaijan, for example.

The IOC says 206 teams — 205 nations and the refugee team — will be taking part in the opening ceremony. Some nations will have their flags carried by volunteers. Other nations will have only one flag-



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bearer. Most will have two, with one male and one female athlete chosen for the role.

The Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony is about to begin, 364 days behind the original schedule and with a very different feel than what was originally intended before the pandemic changed everything.

The Olympic Stadium is largely empty. The Tokyo 2020 souvenir store outside the front gates is closed. But that doesn't mean fans have stayed away. Hundreds of fans gathered outside the gates and along the sidewalks of closed streets, waving at any person with an Olympic credential or any vehicle that went by with an Olympic logo.

Track and field events will be held in the stadium later in these games. The track itself is covered by a large black tarp for the opening ceremony and the infield is covered with a white tarp, one where graphics will be displayed over the course of the evening.

Some dignitaries and invited guests will be in the stadium seats, including U.S. first lady Jill Biden.

Six Polish swimmers have returned home before the Olympics even started, their dreams scuttled by the country mistakenly sending too many athletes to Tokyo.

Only 17 swimmers from Poland qualified for the Tokyo Games. The country's swimming federation put 23 athletes on the plane to Japan, sparking outrage among those who were denied a chance to compete.

Two-time Olympian Alicja Tchorz was among those sent home. She griped on social media about all the sacrifices she had made to earn another trip to the Summer Games, only for it to result "in a total flop."

The team sent out a statement demanding the resignation of Polish Swimming Federation president Paweł Słomiński. He issued his own statement expressing "regret, sadness and bitterness" about the athletes' situation.

Słomiński said there was confusion over the qualifying rules and he was merely trying to "allow as many players and coaches as possible to take part" in the Olympics.

A bad weather forecast for Monday in Tokyo has prompted Olympic officials to move scheduled rowing events to Sunday.

Officials say rain, high winds and strong gusts could cause choppy and potentially unrowable conditions at the Sea Forest Waterway in Tokyo Bay.

The change affects men's and women's single and double sculls semifinals, and men's and women's fours repechage. The opening heats in the men's and women's eights also were moved from Sunday to Saturday.

Australian swimmer Kaylee McKeown has surprisingly withdrawn from one of her best events because of a busy schedule at the Tokyo Olympics.

McKeown dropped the 200-meter individual medley, where she's ranked No. 1 in the world and would have been a favorite to win a gold medal. She'll focus instead on her two backstroke events and the relays.

"You have a rookie coming into the Olympics — it is a new experience and a big call," Australian coach Rohan Taylor said.

The 200 IM semifinal heats are Monday night and the 100 back final is the next morning. Taylor says the timing "could be a challenge," so the decision was made to drop the individual medley.

McKeown set a world record in the 100 back last month at the Australian trials, and the 20-year-old swimmer will be a gold medal favorite in that event.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee says about 100 of the 613 U.S. athletes descending on Tokyo for the Olympics are unvaccinated.

Medical director Jonathan Finnoff says 567 of the American athletes had filled out their health histories as they prepared for the trip. He estimated 83% had replied they were vaccinated.

Finnoff says 83 percent is a substantial number and the committee is quite happy with it.

Nationally, 56.3% of Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

The International Olympic Committee estimates that around 85% of residents of the Olympic Village

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are vaccinated. That's based that on what each country's Olympic committee reports but is not an independently verified number.

South Korea's An San has broken the women's Olympic archery record with a score of 680 in the qualifying round on a hot and humid day.

Her mark topped the score of 673 set by Lina Herasymenko of Ukraine in 1996. An San's teammates Jang Minhee (677) and Kang Chae Young (675) were second and third.

Russian Olympic Committee archer Svetlana Gomboeva collapsed in the intense heat and was treated by medical staff. The temperature soared above 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit).

In the men's qualifying round, Kim Je Deok of South Korea posted the top mark of 688, with Brady Ellison of the United States second (682) and Oh Jin Hyek of South Korea third (681).

The Olympic debut of the mixed team event will be Saturday. The women's individual competition is next Friday and the men's individual event the following day.

About 50 protesters have gathered in Tokyo to demand the cancellation of the Olympics.

The opening ceremony is set for Friday evening local time.

The protesters gathered outside the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building chanting "no to the Olympics" and "save people's lives." They held up signs reading "cancel the Olympics."

The Games, largely without spectators and opposed by much of the host nation, are going ahead a year later than planned.

A day earlier, Tokyo hit another six-month high in new COVID-19 cases as worries grew of worsening infections during the Games. Still, the number of cases and deaths as a share of the population in Japan are much lower than in many other countries.

The opening ceremony will be held mostly without spectators to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections, although some officials, guests and media will attend.

Jill Biden has held a virtual meet-and-greet with several U.S. athletes who will compete at the Tokyo Games.

The U.S. first lady is in Tokyo to support the athletes and attend the opening ceremony.

She spoke virtually with Eddy Alvarez, a baseball player and short track speed skater, and basketball player Sue Bird. Both will be flagbearers for the U.S. at the opening ceremony. She also spoke with Allison Schmitt, a four-time Olympic swimmer and mental health advocate.

Biden told the athletes that they'd given up a lot to be in Tokyo and relied on support from family and friends.

On Saturday, she'll dedicate a room in the residence of the U.S. chief of mission to former U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, and his wife, Irene Hirano Inouye.

She will host a U.S.-vs.-Mexico softball watch party at the U.S. Embassy for staff and their families, and cheer U.S. athletes competing in several events before leaving Tokyo.

South African race walker Lebogang Shange has been banned for four years for doping and will miss the Tokyo Olympics.

The former African champion was entered in the men's 20-kilometer race on Aug. 5. The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled on the case in Tokyo.

The 30-year-old Shange tested positive for the anabolic steroid trenbolone and was provisionally suspended in December 2019. His ban will expire before the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Swiss Olympic team says 400-meter hurdler Kariem Hussein has accepted a nine-month ban after testing positive for a banned stimulant.

The 2014 European champion was entered in the event at the Tokyo Games. The heats start next Friday.

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It is unclear if Hussein will be replaced in the 40-athlete lineup.

The Swiss Olympic body's tribunal backdated the ban by one week from the time Hussein was provisionally suspended. That suspension had not been disclosed.

Tokyo Olympic organizers have reported 25 new COVID-19 cases. Three of them are athletes that were announced on Thursday.

There are 13 athletes among the 110 Olympic-accredited people that have tested positive in Japan since July 1.

Three media workers coming to Japan from abroad were included in the latest update.

Naomi Osaka's opening match in the Olympic tennis tournament has been pushed back from Saturday to Sunday.

Organizers did not immediately provide a reason for the switch. They said only that the move came from the tournament referee.

Osaka was originally scheduled to play 52nd-ranked Zheng Saisai of China in the very first contest of the Games on center court Saturday morning.

One reason for the move could be that Osaka might have a role in the opening ceremony Friday night. That wouldn't leave her much time to rest before a Saturday morning match.

Osaka is returning to competition for the first time in nearly two months after she withdrew from the French Open following the first round to take a mental health break.

She is one of Japan's top athletes.

The World Anti-Doping Agency says several Russian athletes have been kept away from the Tokyo Olympics because of doping suspicions based on evidence from a Moscow testing laboratory that was shut down in 2015.

WADA director general Olivier Niggli says it intervened with sports bodies to ensure those athletes — "not many, but there was a handful" — were not selected.

The team of 335 Russian athletes accredited for Tokyo is competing without a national flag and anthem as punishment for state tampering with the Moscow lab's database. The team name is ROC, the acronym for Russian Olympic Committee, without the word "Russia."

The identity ban for the Tokyo Olympics and 2022 Beijing Winter Games was imposed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport last December.

Giving WADA the database and samples from the lab was key to getting closure for the long-running Russian state-backed doping scandal.

WADA had a list of around 300 athletes under suspicion and gave evidence to Olympic sports bodies for possible disciplinary cases.

Niggli says "we cross-checked what we had from this long list" to ensure athletes were not selected for Tokyo.

Russian archer Svetlana Gomboeva lost consciousness during a competition at the Tokyo Olympics in intense heat.

Coach Stanislav Popov says in comments via the Russian Olympic Committee that Gomboeva collapsed shortly after completing the qualifying round Friday.

Popov says "she couldn't stand it, a whole day in the heat" and adds that humidity made the problem worse. Temperatures in Tokyo were above 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit.)

The heat in Tokyo's summer months already prompted organizers to move the marathons and race-walking events to the cooler city of Sapporo.

U.S. men's water polo captain Jesse Smith will skip the opening ceremony for the Tokyo Olympics on

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Friday after the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee limited how many players from his team could participate in the festivities.

Olympic water polo rosters consist of 13 players, and 12 are designated as available for each game. Smith said the team was told by the USOPC that it could have 12 credentialed athletes walk in the ceremony.

"We tried to keep our team together and change it with every constructive outlet, but no success, and now it's time to refocus on getting game ready," Smith wrote on Twitter. "So tonight I am sending my team out there to represent (the United States) proudly and soak up every moment. Let's go boys!"

The 38-year-old Smith is playing in his fifth Olympics, matching Tony Azevedo for most Olympic teams for a U.S. water polo athlete. He was under consideration to serve as the male U.S. flag bearer for the opening ceremony before that honor went to baseball player Eddy Alvarez.

A map on the Olympic website has been changed after Ukraine protested that it included a border across the Crimean Peninsula.

The map is part of a "Cheer Zone" feature tracking how fans around the world have backed different teams at the Tokyo Games.

Late Thursday the map had a black line across the top of Crimea in the same style as national borders. On Friday morning, there was no line across the peninsula. Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine still considers it to be Ukrainian territory.

The Ukrainian embassy in Japan tells the Associated Press in an e-mail that "we have protested to the IOC and the map was corrected."

Road cyclist Michal Schlegel is the fourth Czech athlete from three different sports to test positive before their competition at the Tokyo Games.

Schlegel tested positive at the team's training base in Izu and will miss Saturday's road race.

The Czech Olympic Committee said in a statement Friday that Schlegel is in isolation, and that Michael Kukrle and Zdenek Stybar will be its only two riders lining up at Musashinonomori Park for one of the first medal events of the Summer Games.

Czech beach volleyball players Marketa Slukova and Ondrej Perusic and table tennis player Pavel Sirucek also tested positive earlier this week. That has prompted the Czech Olympic team to investigate whether the outbreak is linked to its chartered flight to Tokyo.

## **Virus's impact: More relaxing and thinking, less socializing**

By AMY DiPIERRO Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The eruption of COVID-19 last year caused the proportion of people working from home in the U.S. to nearly double, with the shift most pronounced among college graduates and workers in such fields as finance and professional services.

The share of employed people working from home shot up from just 22% in 2019 to 42% in 2020, the Labor Department said Thursday.

That was among the striking findings of an annual government survey that documents the far-reaching impact the viral pandemic has had on Americans' everyday lives since it struck in March of last year. The American Time Use Survey details how people spent their time in 2020, from working to relaxing to sleeping. The survey participants, all of whom are ages 15 or over, are interviewed by phone about everything they did in a 24-hour period leading up to the interview. (For 2020, the report covered only May through December, after the virus caused the suspension of data collection earlier in the year.)

Because of the pandemic and the widespread social distancing it required, people on average spent more time last year sleeping, watching TV, playing games, using a computer and relaxing and thinking — and less time socializing and communicating in person — than in 2019. Adults also spent more hours, on average, caring for children in their household.

The survey also lends support to concerns that the pandemic worsened isolation for millions of Ameri-

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cans. With people working from home or attending school online, the time they spent alone increased. Among Americans ages 15 and over, time spent alone each day increased by an average of an hour. For those ages 15 to 19, it rose 1.7 hours per day.

Among workers with at least a bachelor's degree ages 25 and over, 65% who were employed reported working from home in the 24-hour survey period in 2020 — a 28 percentage point increase from 2019. By contrast, only 19% of employed workers in the same age bracket whose maximum education level is a high school diploma worked at home in 2020, up from 13% in 2019.

The transition to remote work was less common in sectors of the economy that involve face-to-face contact or specialized commercial equipment — from leisure and hospitality to transportation and utilities — than in sectors that do not.

While the share of people working remotely rose for both men and women, the increase was slightly higher among employed women. The share of women working from home jumped by 23 percentage points in 2020 compared with a 16 percentage point increase among men.

More time spent at home, working or otherwise, meant that Americans spent less time on the road. Average time spent on travel, such as commuting to work, declined by 26 minutes per day from 2019 to 2020.

Liana C. Sayer, director of the Maryland Time Use Laboratory at the University of Maryland, suggested that the shift to telework has likely accelerated Americans' preference for flexibility in setting their work schedules — and perhaps raised expectations that employers will accommodate them.

"Workers have indicated in surveys done by companies and other research groups that they prefer having the ability to work at home and set their starting time and their ending time as they find most appropriate for their other needs," Sayer said. "Some are signaling that they don't really want to go back to life as it was in the office before the pandemic."

The Labor Department's annual survey seeks to measure how, where and with whom Americans spend their time. The latest results revealed that the increased time spent on child care in 2020 reflected the cancellation of in-person school instruction, sports and other events for children. Adults whose youngest child was between ages 6 and 12 spent 1.6 hours more per day caring for a child while doing something else as their main activity than in 2019.

At the same time, fewer adults living with children provided child care on a given day in 2020. That might have reflected less time devoted to picking up and dropping off children from in-person activities.

The data also showed increased gender differences in child care: Women spent 13 more minutes a day in 2020 on direct care for children in their household in 2020 compared with 2019, while men spent roughly the same amount of time in 2020 as in 2019.

And women spent 46 minutes more than men doing education-related activities for children in their household in 2020. In 2019, men and women had spent roughly the same amount of time on these activities.

An analysis of the survey data by the Brookings Institution found that mothers of children 12 and under at home spent, on average, more than eight hours on child care. The Brookings analysis also found that working mothers provided 7.4 hours of child care on weekdays in 2020, spending more time than employed fathers, unemployed fathers and fathers not in the labor force.

"Child care is now a full-time job for mothers," said Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at Brookings. "They're spending more than eight hours a day doing child care, and their work hours have suffered. Even if they're juggling both child care responsibilities and working, they're now working less than they would before."

With many businesses closed because of public health recommendations, the survey found less time spent at bars, restaurants, grocery stores and shopping malls and more time spent at home. People ages 15 and over also spent more time with members of their own household than in 2019 and fewer hours with everyone else.

People spent, on average, 32 minutes per day more on sports and leisure in 2020 — a function, in part, of the decline in employment and travel during the pandemic. They also watched more TV and benefited from a few more minutes of sleep each day.

"If people are well-rested, I don't think that's the worst thing in the world," said Daniel Hamermesh, an

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economist at Barnard College who studies the economics of time use. "I'm in favor of more leisure. So I don't think this implies anything negative about the economy that we didn't already know."

## **Pelosi says 'deadly serious' Jan. 6 probe to go without GOP**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Unfazed by Republican threats of a boycott, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared that a congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection will take on its "deadly serious" work whether Republicans participate or not.

The Republicans' House leader, Kevin McCarthy, called the committee a "sham process" and suggested that GOP lawmakers who take part could face consequences. McCarthy said Pelosi's rejection of two of the Republicans he had attempted to appoint was an "egregious abuse of power."

The escalating tension between the two parties — before the investigation has even started — is emblematic of the raw partisan anger that has only worsened on Capitol Hill since then-President Donald Trump's supporters laid siege to the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Joe Biden's presidential election victory. With most Republicans still loyal to Trump, and many downplaying the severity of the violent attack, there is little bipartisan unity to be found.

McCarthy said Wednesday that he would withdraw the names of all five Republicans he had appointed after Pelosi rejected two of them, Reps. Jim Banks of Indiana and Jim Jordan of Ohio. Pelosi made clear on Thursday that she won't relent, and Democrats mulled filling the empty seats themselves.

"It is my responsibility as the speaker of the House to make sure we get to the truth of this, and we will not let their antics stand in the way of that," Pelosi said of the Republicans.

It is unclear, for now, whether Pelosi will try to appoint more members to the select panel, as she has the authority to do under committee rules. She left open that possibility, saying that there are other members who would like to participate. But she said she hadn't decided whether to appoint Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, one of only two Republicans who voted in support of creating the panel last month.

The other, Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, has already been appointed by Pelosi to sit on the committee along with seven Democrats — ensuring they have a quorum to proceed, whether other Republicans participate or not.

Cheney praised Kinzinger, saying he would be a "tremendous addition" to the panel. Several Democrats on the panel also seemed to support the idea, with Chairman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi saying the military veteran is a "the kind of person we'd want to have."

Banks and Jordan are outspoken allies of Trump, who has continued to spread lies alleging massive fraud in the election despite no evidence of that and has defended his supporters who broke into the Capitol. The rioters fought past police and sent lawmakers inside running for their lives. Trump's allegations of fraud were rejected by courts, his attorney general and other prominent Republicans.

The House voted in May to create an independent investigation that would have been evenly split between the parties, but Senate Republicans blocked that approach in a vote. Pelosi said the new panel was being created only because a bipartisan commission was no longer an option.

Asked Thursday if Cheney — and potentially Kinzinger — could be stripped of their regular committee assignments as retaliation for participating, McCarthy said "the conference will look at it." Cheney accepted the assignment from Pelosi earlier this month despite similar threats from McCarthy.

Pelosi accepted McCarthy's three other picks — Illinois Rep. Rodney Davis, North Dakota Rep. Kelly Armstrong and Texas Rep. Troy Nehls. But McCarthy said that all five or none would participate.

Like Jordan and Banks, Nehls voted to overturn Biden's victory. Armstrong and Davis voted to certify the election.

Banks recently traveled with Trump to the U.S.-Mexico border and visited him at his New Jersey golf course. In a statement after McCarthy chose him for the panel, he sharply criticized the Democrats who had set it up.

"Make no mistake, Nancy Pelosi created this committee solely to malign conservatives and to justify the

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left's authoritarian agenda," Banks said.

Democrats whom Pelosi appointed to the committee this month were angry over that statement and concerned over Banks' two recent visits with Trump, according to a senior Democratic aide familiar with the private deliberations who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss them.

Jordan, the top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, was one of Trump's most vocal defenders during his two impeachments and last month likened the new investigation to "impeachment three." Trump was impeached by the House and acquitted by the Senate both times.

The panel is also considering hiring former Rep. Denver Riggleman of Virginia, a Republican who has criticized Trump's lies about election fraud, as an outside adviser, according to a person familiar with the committee's work who was granted anonymity to discuss the private talks.

Cheney told reporters she agrees with Pelosi's decision to reject the two Republicans named by McCarthy. "At every opportunity, the minority leader has attempted to prevent the American people from understanding what happened — to block this investigation," Cheney said.

The panel will hold its first hearing next week, with at least four police officers who battled rioters testifying about their experiences. Members of the committee met Thursday afternoon to prepare.

Thompson said the hearing would allow the law enforcement officers to tell their stories and "set the tone" for the investigation's launch.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner determined he died of natural causes.

## Olympic Games, Tokyo-style: The pandemic era, in miniature

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Ghostly airports, devoid of bustle. Cavernous arenas where no crowds will roar. Stringent rules that are spottily enforced — and spottily ignored. Complaints over restrictions, including comparisons to Nazi Germany. Worries about outsiders causing superspreader events. And a general unease that life as we know it is upside down.

The coronavirus pandemic that interrupted the world and is digging in its heels once again in Asia? Or the seriously peculiar Olympic Games that are about to happen in its midst? Both, actually.

The Olympics are often billed, enthusiastically and with no small amount of self-interest, as a slice of the globalized 21st-century world in miniature — humanity's very best on display. But for these weeks in Tokyo, the entire affair instead feels more like an industrial-strength clip reel of humanity's last 18 months.

Like so many Olympics, the Games reflect the world in which they are taking place. This time, it's a microcosm of the pandemic with all its challenges and fears, all of its irritations and surreal landscapes, jammed into a single metropolitan area during a brief moment in history eyed warily by a COVID-wearied civilization.

"The Olympic movement is living in the middle of society, and we are not living in a tranquil world," said Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee. "We are living in a very fragile world, and therefore we have to react to this."

For those who have watched the pandemic unfold across the world during the past 18 months — and who among us hasn't? — the list of similarities between the Pandemic Olympics and the fragile world writ large is, in fact, a long one.

Among the shared traits, seen in recent days:

People talking past each other as they try to make their points more and more vehemently. Questionable information propagating and spreading. Sudden, unexpected positive tests that upend the best-laid plans. Inequities in vaccine distribution and access. Sporting events that should contain many thousands of people, instead brimming with empty seats and silence.

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And did we mention “no high-fives,” as the signs that festoon Tokyo’s largely deserted Narita International Airport demand?

Why, then, is this pandemic microcosm taking place at all, despite the fact that virus spikes across Asia are shutting down much of the continent once again? Choose your reason — based on your level of cynicism.

There’s a case to be made, of course, for the idealistic storyline perpetually pushed by the IOC, which goes something like this: Even in a nonviral year, the gathering of disparate nations and their paragons of excellence is a necessary tonic for a complex, contentious, fragmented world. And during a pandemic? Maybe even more so.

Sure, yes, fine. But there have been other, more mercantile and tactical reasons to press forward. The media contracts that will richly reward the IOC and broadcast networks. The partnerships and sponsorships that help keep the gears of corporate endorsement grinding.

And the deep desire of some in Japan — in the face of significant public reluctance and sometimes outright anger — to “deliver,” as the newly fashionable word goes, an Olympics that reflects well upon the country despite repeated potholes of corruption, sexual harassment and offensive humor.

“The value of Tokyo 2020 is still exciting, and we want to send our messages to the world,” organizing committee President Seiko Hashimoto said Thursday.

Many such messages are being sent, just as they have been around the world during the pandemic. But not all of them might meet Hashimoto’s approval.

Like leaders elsewhere, she might not like the people in Tokyo who, beseeched not to go out to bars, took their drinking into the streets and complained of hypocrisy by luminaries arriving in town. And there’s the message of vaccinations: Only 22% of Japanese have been fully vaccinated, a strikingly low number despite massive efforts — and a source of worry in the runup to the Games.

Perhaps the most universal question, be it the Olympics or the pandemic overall, is the continuing and fundamental clash of values within families, companies and communities around the notion of risk-taking: Is plowing ahead and soldiering on with life the wiser choice, or is the ever-invoked “overabundance of caution” the way to go?

“There is no zero risk in life,” WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this week, praising the Tokyo Games even as he took aim once again at the overall global pandemic response.

As with the larger pandemic, though, there is a lot of airspace between zero risk and reckless risk. The world has spent more than a year negotiating that transaction — globally, regionally, locally, within individual households. And it hasn’t always done well. Will these Olympics be any different?

Yes, almost all recent Games have been filled with risks, perceived and otherwise. Risks of terrorism (Sochi, Salt Lake City, London), of political and military unrest (Pyeongchang) and of general crime (Rio). But more than any other Olympics in memory, this Tokyo edition is an intricate exercise in risk management. That comes through in almost every statement from every official, in every question from every journalist, and out of the mouths of so many of the world’s athletes.

But if the Olympics are a microcosm of the pandemic, the small sliver reflecting the larger whole, could they ultimately have an effect on that larger whole? If nothing else, the next two weeks — the challenges they present to athletes and organizers, the dangerous things that are avoided and why — could offer some hints to the larger world on how to move forward, or how not to.

Over and over, the Olympics insist that they represent the world, a world condensed for a fleeting moment into cooperation and international comity and a common reach for excellence. Sounds like something that Pandemic Planet could really use right about now.

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## Study: Chinese COVID shot may offer elderly poor protection

By HUIZHONG WU and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — A new study suggests that a Sinopharm vaccine offers poor protection from COVID-19 among the elderly, raising questions for dozens of countries that have given the Chinese



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company's shots to their most vulnerable populations.

A survey of blood samples taken from 450 people in Hungary at least two weeks after their second Sinopharm dose found that 90% under 50 years old developed protective antibodies. But the percentage declined with age, and 50% of those over 80 had none.

The study by two Hungarian researchers was posted online this week but not yet reviewed by other scientists. Three outside experts said they had no problems with the methodology of the study of the vaccine developed by Sinopharm's Beijing Institute of Biological Products.

"This is very, very worrying that these people, who are high-risk, have a poor antibody response," said Jin Dong-yan, a Hong Kong University virologist who was not affiliated with the study.

Antibody levels are not a direct measure of how protected a person is from COVID-19, but there is growing evidence that they are a good proxy. One expert cautioned that the choice of test kits could have limited the accuracy of the measurements.

Still, the study's findings have value and are the first public, scientific attempt to analyze the effect of the Sinopharm vaccine in the elderly, said Wang Chenguang, a former professor at Peking Union Medical College and an immunology expert.

China's National Health Commission declined to comment on the study, saying it would only respond to studies by governments or major research institutions.

This is not the first time questions have been raised about the efficacy of the vaccine, which was given a greenlight by the World Health Organization in May and is being used in more than 50 countries, many of which seized upon it when other vaccines were tough to come by.

A spokesperson for the WHO said Wednesday that its experts "are aware of the study and continue to look at all available evidence." The agency's advisers raised questions months ago about whether it provided protection in people 60 and over, but when it was OK'd a WHO expert said that there was no reason to think it would work differently in the elderly.

The vaccine is one of two similar shots developed by Sinopharm. The state-owned Chinese company's research showed that almost all the participants in final-stage clinical trials were under 60 — and its own researchers said there was insufficient evidence to say whether the vaccines work in the elderly. Overall, the Beijing Institute vaccine was found to be 78% effective.

In Hungary, concern about the shots led many to seek out private antibody tests. Eventually the capital city of Budapest offered free testing to elderly residents as part a bid to ratchet up pressure on the government to conduct its own wider survey and provide booster shots to those who need them.

After initially rebuffing calls for a government response to efficacy concerns — including from the antibody study's authors Balazs Sarkadi and Tamas Ferenci — Prime Minister Viktor Orban finally acquiesced last week in the face of growing public anger. He announced that the government would provide its citizens with an optional third shot.

His office said, though, that all vaccines authorized by Hungary are effective.

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain both announced in May that they, too, would offer a third dose of Sinopharm amid concerns about an insufficient antibody response. Bahrain recommended that people over 50 and some other vulnerable people receive Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine as their booster regardless of whether they got Sinopharm initially.

CNBG, the Sinopharm subsidiary that oversees the Beijing Institute, has said a third dose is not part of the company's clinical guidance.

It's not clear how many doses of the Beijing Institute Sinopharm vaccine have been exported. Overall, China exported 500 million vaccines doses in the first half of the year, and the company is one of country's two major COVID vaccine makers, along with privately owned Sinovac.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization recently ordered 550 million doses from the two companies for the U.N.-backed COVAX program.

Both Sinopharm vaccines are also in wide use in China, including in the elderly. The country's National Health Commission said in April that the shots provide some protection, even though it acknowledged that early stages of clinical trials of Sinopharm's vaccines and two others found fewer antibodies in people

60 and over.

In Budapest, Beata Englohner became concerned for her 76-year-old mother after hearing that people who had been vaccinated with Sinopharm were shown to have no antibodies.

Englohner started a Facebook group to press the government to address the issue. She is cautiously optimistic now that Hungary will offer a third dose.

"We're very glad that we achieved our aim and that we were heard," she said. "Though we're a bit afraid that we'll receive what we already got before."

## Eritrean refugees under attack in Ethiopia's Tigray war

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Thousands of Eritrean refugees are increasingly caught in the middle of the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, where witnesses and U.N. officials say forces have attacked their camps, abducted or killed some of the residents, and stolen their food and possessions.

The refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in the Tigray conflict, which broke out in November between the region's forces and Ethiopian federal troops. It has left thousands of people dead.

The refugees say they have been targeted by both sides. Troops from their native Eritrea, which sent forces over the border to support Ethiopian soldiers, have been accused of destroying a refugee camp and abductions. And the refugees say they have also come under attack as scapegoats from Tigrayans, who allege widespread abuses by Eritrean soldiers.

Before the conflict, around 50,000 Eritrean refugees — many of whom fled their country's authoritarian government and its policy of indefinite military service — were present in four camps in Tigray, according to the United Nations. Another 42,000 were scattered elsewhere in the region and the rest of Ethiopia. Two of the camps were destroyed early in the war, and the fate of thousands of their residents is unknown.

Last week, Tigray forces captured the remaining two camps, Mai Aini and Adi Harush, after launching an offensive against forces from the neighboring Amhara region as they sought to take back more territory following the retreat of Eritrean and Ethiopian federal forces from the region last month.

Residents of Adi Harush camp told The Associated Press that Tigray forces have since abducted more than a dozen refugees and raided dozens of homes, stealing mobile phones, food and other supplies. "There is a lot of daily robbery," said one resident who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Last week, the U.N. refugee agency's Ethiopia representative, Ann Encontre, expressed alarm and confirmed the death of at least one Eritrean refugee. "Tens of thousands of refugees, fearful for their lives, are currently trapped and unable to move due to the insecurity and ongoing movement of troops," she said.

Ethiopia's refugee agency in a statement on Thursday called it "tantamount to a hostage situation."

Fighting continues to the south of the camps, where Amhara forces are massing with the intention of retaking the area. Refugees in Adi Harush said Tigray forces positioned weapons in the camp to repel an attack.

Separately, U.N. refugee chief Filippo Grandi condemned the arrests in recent weeks of "hundreds" of refugees in Shire, a town under Tigray forces' control, and cited "credible and corroborated reports of reprisal attacks, abductions, arrests and violence meted out against Eritrean refugees for their perceived affiliation with one side or the other" since the conflict began in November.

The Tigray forces have denied targeting Eritrean refugees and in a statement on Thursday they said they were "gravely concerned" about reports of attacks. Spokesman for the forces, Getachew Reda, could not be reached for further comment.

Meanwhile, the whereabouts of some 9,200 Eritrean refugees from the two other camps, Hitsats and Shimelba, are unknown, according to the U.N. Fighting erupted in Hitsats in November when Eritrean troops captured the surrounding area from Tigray forces.

The Eritreans later withdrew from the camp, and Tigray forces reclaimed the area. Several refugees said the Tigray forces engaged in reprisal attacks against them, killing 10 people outside the camp's church.

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"We were all afraid, so we left the camp, but the Tigray militias followed us," said one Hitsats resident. "When they caught us, they threw grenades. A lot of people I know died that day. ... I think they wanted revenge because the Eritrean government attacked them."

Other Eritrean refugees told similar accounts of attacks by Tigray forces after they fled Hitsats. One said 40 of the 60 people he was traveling with were killed near the settlement of Zban Gedena.

Another refugee said dozens of people he fled with were killed in the same area. "I have never been scared like I was on that day," he said.

Many of the camp's residents were rounded up by Tigray forces and taken back to Hitsats.

"That's when the hard times started," said a refugee who was rounded up. "For one month there was nothing to eat or drink. We were eating leaves and grass to survive."

Several residents said Tigray forces beat camp residents and stole their food while in control of Hitsats in December. Eritrean refugees described similar hardships in Shimelba camp and said 16 refugees were killed there in January amid fighting by Tigray forces and Eritrean troops.

An internal U.N. assessment seen by the AP confirmed that deaths, abductions and looting occurred in Shimelba and Hitsats but concluded the perpetrators were "unknown armed groups."

In January, Eritrean forces retook Hitsats camp and ordered the remaining residents to leave, several refugees who witnessed it told the AP.

"The Eritrean troops ordered all the refugees back to Eritrea via Sheraro," one Hitsats resident said. "At Sheraro, they ordered us onto large trucks, but I managed to escape by hiding myself in a house."

Other refugees said Eritrean troops made thousands of refugees walk to the border, but they suggested that, even though they could face further persecution by the authoritarian government in Eritrea, some may have returned voluntarily to escape the violence in Tigray. Eritrea's Information Ministry did not respond to questions.

A refugee now in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, said he saw Eritrean soldiers dousing buildings in Hitsats camp in petrol and setting them alight immediately after the refugees were ordered to leave. Refugees interviewed also said troops previously abducted residents of both Hitsats and Shimelba.

The U.N. estimates that 7,300 Eritrean refugees from Shimelba and Hitsats made it to Mai Aini and Adi Harush. Now, months later, as the Tigray forces expand their offensive, the refugees fear again being caught up in hostilities.

In a text message, one Adi Harush resident described a desperate situation with no access to aid and constant harassment by Tigray forces. "By God, please help us," he said.

## Western wildfires: Crews make progress on huge Oregon blaze

By NATHAN HOWARD Associated Press

BLY, Ore. (AP) — The nation's largest wildfire raged through southern Oregon on Friday but crews were scaling back some night operations as hard work and weaker winds helped reduce the spread of flames even as wildfires continued to threaten homes in neighboring California.

The Bootleg Fire, which has destroyed an area half the size of Rhode Island, was 40% surrounded after burning some 70 homes, mainly cabins, fire officials said.

At least 2,000 homes were ordered evacuated at some point during the fire and an additional 5,000 were threatened.

The upper eastern edge of the blaze continued to move toward Summer Lake, jumping fire lines on Thursday and prompting a local evacuation order for some portions of Lake County to be raised to "go now!," fire officials said.

Winds up to 10 miles per hour (16 kilometers per hour) could drive the flames through timber but not at the pace seen last week, when the wind-driven blaze grew exponentially, fire information officer Angela Goldman said.

The fire, which was sparked by lightning, had been expanding by up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day, pushed by strong winds and critically dry weather.

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There was good news on the lower portion of the 624-square-mile (1,616-square-kilometer) blaze. Crews had locked in containment lines and on the lower southeastern side, crews were able to gain a substantial foothold, allowing them to cut back to nighttime patrols from what had been a "24-7 run-and-gun" fight, fire information officer Sarah Gracey said.

"For us, that's a pretty big step," she said. "It's not that easy to work in a pitch-black forest in the middle of the night."

Crews will be able to rest and contribute to dayside attacks, she said.

"We have had day after day of red flag warnings (of extreme fire danger) and today we don't have a red flag warning," Gracey said Thursday. However, low humidity and high temperatures remained a concern.

That side of the blaze also had burned into an area blackened by a previous fire, creating gaps in the fuel and reducing the spread of flames through grass, shrub and timber, Gracey said.

In California, the Tamarack Fire south of Lake Tahoe had burned more than 78 square miles (202 square kilometers) of timber and head-high chaparral in national forest land. It erupted July 4 and was one of nearly two dozen blazes sparked by lightning strikes.

The fire in Alpine County has destroyed at least 10 buildings. Fire officials expected active or extreme fire behavior on Friday because of afternoon gusts and temperatures approaching 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius).

Blowing embers from flames ignited a new spot fire Thursday afternoon that jumped the highway north of Topaz Lake on the California-Nevada line, prompting a new evacuation order at Topaz Lake Estates and neighboring areas.

The fire was less than a mile from the estates, a community of around 1,200 people in Douglas County, Nevada.

"Firefighters on the ground and aircraft continue to battle the growing spot under exceptionally difficult weather and fuel condition," the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest said in an update.

It estimated the new blaze already had burned nearly 4 square miles (10 square kilometers).

New mandatory evacuation orders were issued Thursday in Plumas County west of the Nevada border as the Dixie Fire continued to grow explosively eastward.

"This fire is outpacing us at moments," Shannon Prather, the incident commander, said Thursday evening.

The fire had burned nearly 177 square miles (458 square kilometers), destroyed at least eight buildings and threatened at least 1,500 more, fire officials said.

Extremely dry conditions and recent heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

## Canada vs Zimbabwe: Two divergent paths of COVID vaccination

By MARIA CHENG and FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — When mother-of-three Amanda Wood heard that hundreds of coronavirus shots were available for teens, only one thing prevented her from racing to the vaccination site at a Toronto high school — her 13-year-old daughter's fear of needles.

Wood told Lola: If you get the vaccine you'll be able to see your friends again. You'll be able to play sports. And enticed by the promise of resuming a normal, teen life, Lola agreed.

In Zimbabwe, more than 8,000 miles (13,000 kilometers) and a world away from Canada, immunity is harder to obtain.

On a recent day, Andrew Ngwenya sat outside his home in a working-class township in Harare, the capital, pondering how he could save himself and his family from COVID-19.

Ngwenya and his wife De-egma had gone to a hospital that sometimes had spare doses. Hours later, fewer than 30 people had been inoculated. The Ngwenyas, parents of four children, were sent home, still desperate for immunization.

"We are willing to have it but we can't access it," he said. "We need it, where can we get it?"

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The stories of the Wood and Ngwenya families reflect a world starkly divided between vaccine haves and have nots, between those who can imagine a world beyond the pandemic and those who can only foresee months and perhaps years of illness and death.

In one country, early stumbles in the fight against COVID-19 were overcome thanks to money and a strong public health infrastructure. In the other, poor planning, a lack of resources and the failure of a global mechanism intended to share scarce vaccines have led to a desperate shortage of COVID-19 shots -- and oxygen tanks and protective equipment, as well.

With 70% of its adult population receiving at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, Canada has among the world's highest vaccination rate and is now moving on to immunize children, who are at far lower risk of coronavirus complications and death.

Meanwhile, only about 9% of the population in Zimbabwe has received one dose of coronavirus vaccine amid a surge of the easier-to-spread delta variant, first seen in India. Many millions of people vulnerable to COVID-19, including the elderly and those with underlying medical problems, are struggling to get immunized as government officials introduce more restrictive measures.

Ngwenya said the crush of people trying to get vaccinated is disheartening.

"The queue is like 5 kilometers (about 3 miles) long. Even if you are interested in a jab you can't stand that. Once you see the queue you won't try again," he said

Vaccines weren't always plentiful in Canada. With no domestic coronavirus vaccine production, the country got off to a sluggish start, with immunization rates behind those in Hungary, Greece and Chile. Canada was also the only G7 country to secure vaccines in the first round of deliveries by a U.N.-backed effort set up to distribute COVID-19 doses primarily to poor countries known as COVAX.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said it had always been Canada's intention to secure vaccines through COVAX, after investing more than \$400 million in the project. The vaccines alliance, Gavi, said COVAX was also meant to provide rich countries with an "insurance policy" in case they didn't have enough shots.

COVAX's latest shipment to Canada — about 655,000 AstraZeneca vaccines — arrived in May, shortly after about 60 poor countries were left in the lurch when the initiative's supplies slowed to a trickle. Bangladesh, for example, had been awaiting a COVAX delivery of about 130,000 vaccines for its Rohingya refugee population; the shots never arrived after the Indian supplier ceased exports.

Canada's decision to secure vaccines through the U.N.-backed effort was "morally reprehensible," said Dr. Prabhat Jha, chair of global health and epidemiology at the University of Toronto. He said Canada's early response to COVID-19 badly misjudged the need for control measures including aggressive contact tracing and border restrictions.

"If not for Canada's purchasing power to procure vaccines, we would be in bad shape right now," he said.

Weeks after the COVAX vaccines arrived, more than 33,000 doses were still sitting in warehouses in Ottawa after health officials recommended Canadians get shots made by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna instead — of which they had bought tens of millions of doses.

The Wood children got the Pfizer vaccine. When Canada began immunizing children aged 12 and over, Wood, who works with children in the entertainment industry and her architect husband didn't hesitate.

Wood said her children, who are all avid athletes, have been unable to play much hockey, soccer or rugby during repeated lockdowns. Lola has missed baking lemon loaves and chocolate chip cookies with her grandmother, who lives three blocks away.

"We felt we had to do our part to keep everyone safe, to keep the elderly safe, and to get the economy going again and the kids back to school," she said.

In Zimbabwe, there is no expectation of a return to normal anytime soon, and things are likely to get worse -- Ngwenya worries about government threats to bar the unvaccinated from public services, including transport.

Although Zimbabwe was allocated nearly 1 million coronavirus vaccines through COVAX, none have been delivered. Its mix of purchased and donated shots — 4.2 million — consist of Chinese, Russian and Indian vaccines.

Official figures show that 4% of the country's 15 million population are now fully immunized.

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The figures make Zimbabwe a relative success in Africa, where fewer than 2% of the continent's 1.3 billion people have been vaccinated, according to the World Health Organization. Meanwhile, the virus is spreading to rural areas where the majority live and health facilities are shambolic.

Ngwenya is a part-time pastor with a Pentecostal church; he said he and his flock have had to rely on their faith to fight the coronavirus. But he said people would rather have vaccines first, and then prayer. "Every man is scared of death," he said. "People are dying and we can see people dying. This is real."

## **To reach a peace deal, Taliban say Afghan president must go**

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The Taliban say they don't want to monopolize power, but they insist there won't be peace in Afghanistan until there is a new negotiated government in Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani is removed.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Taliban spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, who is also a member of the group's negotiating team, laid out the insurgents' stance on what should come next in a country on the precipice.

The Taliban have swiftly captured territory in recent weeks, seized strategic border crossings and are threatening a number of provincial capitals, as the last U.S. and NATO soldiers leave Afghanistan. This week, the top U.S. military officer, Gen. Mark Milley, told a Pentagon press conference that the Taliban have "strategic momentum," and he did not rule out a complete Taliban takeover. But he said it is not inevitable. "I don't think the end game is yet written," he said.

Memories of the Taliban's last time in power some 20 years ago, when they enforced a harsh brand of Islam that denied girls an education and barred women from work, have stoked fears of their return among many. Afghans who can afford it are applying by the thousands for visas to leave Afghanistan, fearing a violent descent into chaos. The U.S.-NATO withdrawal is more than 95% complete and due to be finished by Aug. 31.

Shaheen said the Taliban will lay down their weapons when a negotiated government acceptable to all sides in the conflict is installed in Kabul and Ghani's government is gone.

"I want to make it clear that we do not believe in the monopoly of power because any governments who (sought) to monopolize power in Afghanistan in the past, were not successful governments," said Shaheen, apparently including the Taliban's own five-year rule in that assessment. "So we do not want to repeat that same formula."

But he was also uncompromising on the continued rule of Ghani, calling him a war monger and accusing him of using his Tuesday speech on the Islamic holy day of Eid-al-Adha to promise an offensive against the Taliban. Shaheen dismissed Ghani's right to govern, resurrecting allegations of widespread fraud that surrounded Ghani's 2019 election win. After that vote, both Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah declared themselves president. After a compromise deal, Abdullah is now No. 2 in the government and heads the reconciliation council.

Ghani has often said he will remain in office until new elections can determine the next government. His critics — including ones outside the Taliban — accuse him of seeking only to keep power, causing splits among government supporters.

Last weekend, Abdullah headed a high-level delegation to the Qatari capital Doha for talks with Taliban leaders. It ended with promises of more talks, as well as greater attention to the protection of civilians and infrastructure.

Shaheen called the talks a good beginning. But he said the government's repeated demands for a ceasefire while Ghani stayed in power were tantamount to demanding a Taliban surrender.

"They don't want reconciliation, but they want surrendering," he said.

Before any ceasefire, there must be an agreement on a new government "acceptable to us and to other Afghans," he said. Then "there will be no war."

Shaheen said under this new government, women will be allowed to work, go to school, and participate

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in politics, but will have to wear the hijab, or headscarf. He said women won't be required to have a male relative with them to leave their home, and that Taliban commanders in newly occupied districts have orders that universities, schools and markets operate as before, including with the participation of women and girls.

However, there have been repeated reports from captured districts of Taliban imposing harsh restrictions on women, even setting fire to schools. One gruesome video that emerged appeared to show Taliban killing captured commandos in northern Afghanistan.

Shaheen said some Taliban commanders had ignored the leadership's orders against repressive and drastic behavior and that several have been put before a Taliban military tribunal and punished, though he did provide specifics. He contended the video was fake, a splicing of separate footage.

Shaheen said there are no plans to make a military push on Kabul and that the Taliban have so far "restrained" themselves from taking provincial capitals. But he warned they could, given the weapons and equipment they have acquired in newly captured districts. He contended that the majority of the Taliban's battlefield successes came through negotiations, not fighting.

"Those districts which have fallen to us and the military forces who have joined us ... were through mediation of the people, through talks," he said. "They (did not fall) through fighting ... it would have been very hard for us to take 194 districts in just eight weeks."

The Taliban control about half of Afghanistan's 419 district centers, and while they have yet to capture any of the 34 provincial capitals, they are pressuring about half of them, Milley said. In recent days, the U.S. has carried out airstrikes in support of beleaguered Afghan government troops in the southern city of Kandahar, around which the Taliban have been amassing, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Thursday.

The rapid fall of districts and the seemingly disheartened response by Afghan government forces have prompted U.S.-allied warlords to resurrect militias with a violent history. For many Afghans weary of more than four decades of war, that raises fears of a repeat of the brutal civil war in the early 1990s in which those same warlords battled for power.

"You know, no one no one wants a civil war, including me," said Shaheen.

Shaheen also repeated Taliban promises aimed at reassuring Afghans who fear the group.

Washington has promised to relocate thousands of U.S. military interpreters. Shaheen said they had nothing to fear from the Taliban and denied threatening them. But, he added, if some want to take asylum in the West because Afghanistan's economy is so poor, "that is up to them."

He also denied that the Taliban have threatened journalists and Afghanistan's nascent civil society, which has been targeted by dozens of killings over the past year. The Islamic State group has taken responsibility for some, but the Afghan government has blamed the Taliban for most of the killings while the Taliban in turn accuse the Afghan government of carrying out the killings to defame them. Rarely has the government made arrests into the killings or revealed the findings of its investigations.

Shaheen said journalists, including those working for Western media outlets, have nothing to fear from a government that includes the Taliban.

"We have not issued letters to journalists (threatening them), especially to those who are working for foreign media outlets. They can continue their work even in the future," he said.

## Kanye West unveils new album, Jay-Z track at listening event

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

Kanye West barely said a word during his album listening session Thursday night, but the mercurial rapper still had most attendees standing on their feet while hanging on every word of his new project.

West unveiled his 10th studio album, "Donda" in front of a packed crowd at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. His album was named after his mother, Donda West, who died at the age of 58 following plastic surgery complications in 2007.

Pulling off the listening session — which was livestreamed on Apple Music — was an impressive feat for West, who sold out the venue after he announced two days ago that the first public listen of his highly-

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anticipated album would take place. Some of the big names who attended the event were Rick Ross, Khloe Kardashian and his estranged wife Kim Kardashian West, who showed up in a red jumpsuit with their kids.

Unlike West's typical high-energy concerts, he appeared more mellow. He let his music do the talking while most attendees listened in silence and applauded at the end of each track of his album, slated for release Friday, that features gospel themes, hip-hop vibes, his Auto-Tune vocals, a track featuring his friend-mentor Jay-Z and recorded speeches made by his mother.

While sporting an all-red outfit with orange shoes, West sometimes walked, fell to his knees, and pranced around on a white flooring about the size of the football field, where the city's professional football and soccer teams play home games.

The 22-time Grammy winner revealed in a commercial, featuring U.S. track star Sha'Carri Richardson, during the NBA Finals on Tuesday that his album will be released Friday. The commercial, scored and directed by West, featured "No Child Left Behind," a song from the album.

When West began playing "No Child Left Behind," he drop to one knee before he slightly lifted up into a track runner's stance like Richardson, who will miss the Tokyo Olympics after a positive marijuana test this month. The rapper then stood up and pointed his finger into the air as the words "he's done miracles on me" were heard on the song.

The crowd appeared surprise to hear when Jay-Z began rapping on the final song of the listening session. On social media, the song was lauded for Jay-Z's verse that included "This might be the return of the throne," a nod toward the tandem's 2011 album "Watch the Throne," which earned a Grammy nomination.

After the song finished, West made his way toward the end zone area, stared at the crowd for a few moments and calmly walked off the floor as the audience collectively cheered for him.

West, 44, is mostly known as being associated with Chicago, but he was born in Atlanta — a Georgia city where there are no restrictions against large gatherings. He gifted 5,000 tickets to faculty, staff and students from some Atlanta HBCUs including Clark Atlanta, Morehouse, Spelman, Morris Brown and the Interdenominational Theological Center.

West's new project is a follow up to his 2019 gospel-themed album "Jesus is King," which won a Grammy for best contemporary Christian album.

Last year, West announced on Twitter — with colorful cover art and a track list — that he would release his latest album. At the time, his tweets indicated that his project would release on the same day as his rival Taylor Swift's project "Folklore," but his album ended up being postponed.

The two music stars have been in an ongoing beef since West famously interrupted Swift's speech during the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards when she won for best female video. It appeared both put their differences aside after she introduced him when he won the video vanguard award at the 2015 VMAs, but a leaked video clip between both about his controversial song "Famous" caused more drama.

It's not the first time Kanye has hosted a listening event for an upcoming album. In 2016, he debuted his album "The Life of Pablo" during a massive event and fashion show at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Several big names who attended the show included Kardashian West, 50 Cent, Lil Kim, Caitlyn Jenner, A\$AP Rocky and 2 Chainz.

## Should vaccinated people mask up with COVID-19 cases rising?

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Should vaccinated people mask up with COVID-19 cases rising?

It depends on your situation, but masking in public can provide another layer of protection and help prevent the virus from spreading to others who aren't protected.

An easing of safety precautions and the large number of people who remain unvaccinated in many regions are contributing to the spread of cases around the world.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has not changed its advice that fully vaccinated people can safely go without masks in most situations. But Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the agency's director, said local decisions on mask mandates could vary depending on vaccination levels and whether there's a surge.



Los Angeles County recently started requiring residents to wear masks indoors regardless of vaccination status, for example, and officials in New Orleans are urging people to do the same.

Though COVID-19 vaccines greatly reduce the chance of severe illness and death and remain effective against variants, some experts said wearing a mask is a reasonable precaution since it's still possible to get infected.

Masking could also help prevent the spread of the virus to children too young for vaccination and people with weak immune systems.

"Personally, I continue to wear a mask when going into public spaces outside of my household, both for my own protection and for the sake of my community," said virus researcher Angela Rasmussen of the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization at the University of Saskatchewan.

Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University, said a "belt-and-suspenders" approach also makes sense for people who are older or have health issues and are more vulnerable to getting severely ill if infected.

"I'm pretty healthy, but I do have gray hair. So when I go out to the supermarket, I'm masked," Schaffner said.

## Volunteers hunting for Mexico's 'disappeared' become targets

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The mainly female volunteers who fan out across Mexico to hunt for the bodies of murdered relatives are themselves increasingly being killed, putting to the test the government's promise to help them in their quest for a final shred of justice: a chance to mourn.

Those who carry on the effort tell tales of long getting threats and being watched — presumably by the same people who murdered their sons, brothers and husbands.

But now threats have given way to bullets in the heads of searchers who have proved far better than the authorities at ferreting out the clandestine burial and burning pits that number in the thousands. Two searchers have been slain the past two months.

Aranza Ramos had spent over a year searching for her husband, Bryan Celaya Alvarado, after he vanished Dec. 6, 2020. That day he became one of Mexico's 87,855 "disappeared" people. Most are thought to have been killed by drug cartels, their bodies dumped into shallow graves or burned.

Searchers have learned over the last decade, since the height of Mexico's 2006-2012 drug war, that the gangs often use the same locations over and over again, creating grisly killing fields.

It was at one such field, known as Ejido Ortiz, in the northern border state of Sonora, where Aranza Ramos had been helping search on July 15 — the day she herself was killed.

"In Ejido Ortiz several clandestine crematoriums have been found, some still smoking and burning when they were found," Ramos' search group said in a statement. "This ejido (collective farm plot) is an active extermination site."

So active that searchers say they get nervous when the burials they happen on are too fresh. It means the killers may still be around and using the site.

After a day of searching — the volunteers plunge metal rods into the soil to release the tell-tale odor of death — Ramos returned to her home near the city of Guaymas. Just before midnight, she was abducted from her home. The killers drove her a short distance and dumped her bullet-ridden body on the roadside.

Cecilia Duarte, who has spent three years working with the search group "Buscadoras por la Paz" (Searchers for Peace), attended meetings with Ramos in the week before she was killed. Duarte, who found the body of her own missing son and is now searching for a missing nephew, said Ramos always tried to play it safe.

"She tried not to stand out, she wasn't a spokeswoman," said Duarte. Indeed, Ramos avoided attention. The Associated Press had tried to contact her two months before she was killed, but she did not answer messages.

"Aranza posted a message the week before she died, saying she was searching for her husband, not

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for the suspects," Duarte recalled.

There are three golden rules that Mexico's volunteer search groups follow:

—Human remains aren't referred to as corpses or bodies. The searchers call them "treasures," because to grieving families they are precious.

—Searchers usually call law enforcement when they think they've found a burial, mostly because authorities often refuse to conduct the slow but critical DNA testing unless the remains are professionally exhumed.

—Searches are not conducted to find perpetrators, only to find loved ones.

It is the latter rule that volunteers hoped would keep them safe from retaliation.

"As searchers, we are not seeking to find out who is guilty. We are searching for treasures," said Patricia "Ceci" Flores, founder of Madres Buscadores de Sonora (Searching Mothers of Sonora).

For a long time, it has meant that searchers, and the police who often accompany them, focus on finding graves and identifying remains — not collecting evidence of how they died or who killed them. Search groups sometimes even get anonymous tips about where bodies are buried, knowledge probably available only to the killers or their accomplices.

But that longstanding arrangement appears to have broken down.

The day after Ramos was killed, Flores received a phone threat. "I got a call saying, 'You're going to be next,'" Flores said. Since then, police have assigned a patrol car to stand guard outside her home in Hermosillo.

Sonora state officials have agreed to provide security for searchers deemed to be in danger. The state also agreed to assign excavation teams to potential burial sites found by searchers within three to five days. But officials seem more interested in damage control. They got the searchers to agree not to take photos of burial sites.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador gave a vague and self-assured statement when asked about the killing of Ramos. "We are going to continue to protect all women. We condemn these crimes."

But Ramos was not the first. On May 30, a volunteer search activist, Javier Barajas Piña, was gunned down in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico's most violent. Altogether, 68 human rights and environmental activists have been killed since López Obrador took office.

Fear has always accompanied the searchers. They go to wild, remote, abandoned places where terrible crimes have been committed. But up to now, they mostly shrugged it off.

Cecilia Duarte, the volunteer with Ramos, recalled of those days: "They sent us a message from a false Facebook account saying they were going to flay the skin from us. But I always thought that if they are really going to do something to you, they are not going to warn you."

At another search site, Duarte said, she once felt the sense of being watched — and she spotted somebody observing her group from a nearby hillside. Still, the searchers kept on.

But Ramos' killing changed things, she said. "That did hit us hard. Some people stopped the searches."

Multiple cartels, including one run by Rafael Caro Quintero — improperly released from prison while serving a sentence for the 1985 murder of a DEA agent — have been fighting for control of Sonora and its valuable trafficking routes to the U.S. They include the two main factions of the Sinaloa cartel, operating through local gangs.

"The authorities should do more, it's not enough," said Flores of Madres Buscadores de Sonora. "They should do more investigation, provide more security, they should be investigating so that the mothers aren't the ones who have to go out in the fields searching."

The U.N. human rights office in Mexico made the same point: "When a government does not fulfill its duty (to carry out searches), it puts the families of the disappeared at risk."

## Haitian president's hometown holds funeral amid violence

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti (AP) — The hometown of slain Haitian President Jovenel Moïse prepared to receive his body on Friday for a private funeral amid heavy security following violent protests and fears of political

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volatility in the Caribbean nation.

White T-shirts and caps emblazoned with his picture were distributed to supporters the day before what is expected to be the final ceremony to honor Moïse, who was shot several times on July 7 during an attack at his private home that seriously injured his wife, Martine.

"This is something that will be engraved in our memory," said Pedro Guilloume, a Cap-Haitien resident who hoped to attend the funeral. "Let all Haitians channel solidarity."

The funeral comes days after a new prime minister supported by key international diplomats was installed in Haiti — a move that appeared aimed at averting a leadership struggle following Moïse's assassination.

Ariel Henry, who was designated prime minister by Moïse before he was slain but never sworn in replaced interim prime minister Claude Joseph, and has promised to form a provisional consensus government until elections are held.

On Thursday, violent demonstrations hit neighborhoods in Cap-Haitien as groups of men fired shots into the air and blocked some roads with blazing tires. One heavily guarded police convoy carrying unknown officials drove through one flaming barricade, with a vehicle nearly flipping over.

A priest who presided over a Mass on Thursday morning at Cap-Haitien's cathedral to honor Moïse warned there was too much bloodshed in Haiti as he asked people to find peace, noting that the poorest communities are affected.

On Thursday evening, Martine Moïse and her three children appeared at a small religious ceremony at a hotel in Cap-Haitien where Henry and other government officials offered their condolences.

"They took his life, but they can't take his memories," said a priest who presided over the ceremony. "They can't take his brain. They can't take his ideas. We are Jovenel Moïse."

Moïse was sworn in as Haiti's president in February 2017 and faced increasing criticism in recent years from those who accused him of becoming increasingly authoritarian. He had been ruling by decree for more than a year after the country failed to hold legislative elections.

Authorities have said that at least 26 suspects have been arrested in the killing, including 18 former Colombian soldiers. Police are still looking for several more suspects they say were involved in the assassination plot, including a former rebel leader and an ex-senator.

## Looking at Tokyo Olympics through the lens of the 1964 Games

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Just 19 years after devastating defeat in World War II, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics showcased the reemergence of an innovative country that was showing off bullet trains, miniature transistor radios, and a restored reputation.

Japan's resiliency is on display again, attempting to stage the postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics in the midst of a once-in-a-century pandemic. The challenge is different, and this time there is widespread public opposition that has divided the country over the health hazards with nagging questions about who benefits from staging the Games.

Roy Tomizawa, who documented the '64 Olympics in a recent book, described those distant Games 57 years ago as the "Inclusion Games" in an email to The Associated Press.

He called the attempt this time the "Exclusion Games." But he offered some hope.

"Whether you agree or disagree with the Japanese government, the Games are going ahead in the face of significant risk," Tomizawa said. But he said these Games might also be turned into "Inclusion Games."

"With a high degree of difficulty," he added.

"Organizing an Olympics and Paralympics during this pandemic is like Simone Biles executing a Yurchenko Double Pike, a vault so difficult no other female gymnast wants to do it. Biles can. Maybe Japan can, too," Tomizawa said.

Tomizawa's book is titled: "1964 — The Greatest Year in the History of Japan: How the Tokyo Olympics Symbolized Japan's Miraculous Rise from the Ashes." It came out last year, just months before the postponed Olympics were to open.

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Tomizawa writes in the book about the massive effort to be ready in '64:

"Police were taking pickpockets off the streets and ensuring bars in Tokyo were complying with directives to close down early. ... In fact, every man, woman, and child in Japan was getting ready to welcome the world to their country believing it was their civic duty to ensure that foreigners who came to town were not deprived of any necessity or assistance."

This was the year that Cassius Clay won the heavyweight championship and became Muhammad Ali. It was when Roy Emerson of Australia and Maria Bueno of Brazil took the titles at Wimbledon, when Arnold Palmer claimed his fourth and final Masters, and when the Beatles arrived on a Pan Am flight from London to play their first concert in the United States.

And it was later that same year in Tokyo when Yoshinori Sakai — born on Aug. 6, 1945, in Hiroshima, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on the city — ignited the cauldron in the national stadium to open the 18th Olympic Games.

Tomizawa grew up in New York, and his father, Tom, a second-generation Japanese-American, was an editor who worked for the television network NBC at the Olympics in Tokyo — the first to be shown internationally using communication satellites.

The family connection and curiosity got Tomizawa looking for a history in English of those 1964 Games. He couldn't find one, so he wrote his own.

Tomizawa, who has worked for 20 years in Japan, interviewed 70 Olympians from 16 nations. Some were famous at the time: Australian swimmer Dawn Fraser or American 10,000-meter gold-medalist Billy Mills.

Some made other history, like Bulgarian teammates Nikolai Prodanov and Diana Yorgova, who were married in Tokyo during the Olympics. It was billed as the first Olympic wedding and featured a Shinto priest, sake, traditional Bulgarian dances, and an interpreter to explain what was going on.

He said his favorite interview was with Jerry Shipp, a shooting guard on the American gold-medal winning basketball team coached by Hank Iba. It lasted for several hours with Shipp recounting a tough childhood growing up in an Oklahoma orphanage.

Shipp led the Americans in scoring ahead of Bill Bradley on a team that also included Larry Brown and Walt Hazzard. In addition to Shipp, Tomizawa also interviewed Jeff Mullins, Mel Counts and Luke Jackson.

"I think the Olympians tell more of the story of the Games themselves and their reaction to what they saw of Japan," Tomizawa said. "Some had been to Japan in '50s and '60s. I think everyone was surprised and shocked when they arrived in Japan thinking it would be a backward economy."

They were also taken aback by the nature of the Japanese.

"For the Canadians, the Australians, the Americans, the Brits — it was the brutal enemy," Tomizawa said. "When they came, they were welcomed and given such help and support and cheering. It was a surprise to all of them."

They also found what Tomizawa called "operational excellence," convincing doubters about the country's capabilities. The current Tokyo organizers will need that resiliency, although just getting through these Olympics is sure to be portrayed as a success no matter the details and the financial costs.

Japan is officially spending \$15.4 billion on the Olympics, but government auditors say the costs are much higher. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The International Olympic Committee chips in about \$1.5 billion, and some of this is payment-in-kind rather than cash. Its payoff is the \$3 billion to \$4 billion it earns in broadcasts rights, much of which would be lost with a cancellation.

"Now with the world struggling to combat the coronavirus, there is a question whether Japan can get ready for a global competition within its borders," Tomizawa said by email. "If it can, then Tokyo 2020 is an opportunity for Japan to show the world how resilient this nation, and the world can be. Just bringing athletes from around the globe to compete in Japan will be a monumental achievement."

## Western wildfires grow, but better weather helps crews

By NATHAN HOWARD Associated Press

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BLY, Ore. (AP) — Lower winds and better weather helped crews using bulldozers and helicopters battling the nation's largest wildfire in southern Oregon, but gusty winds pushed a Northern California wildfire into Nevada on Thursday, prompting evacuations as blazes burn across the West.

Oregon's Bootleg Fire grew to 624 square miles (1,616 square kilometers) — over half the size of Rhode Island. However, authorities said higher humidity Wednesday and overnight and better conditions allowed crews to improve fire lines. The fire also was approaching an area burned by a previous fire on its active southeastern flank, raising hopes that a lack of fuel could reduce its spread, and the forecast was for favorable firefighting weather again Thursday.

"Fire crews and support personnel have made significant progress in containing this fire in the last few days," Joe Prummer, incident commander trainee of Pacific Northwest Incident Management Team 2, said in a statement. "However, we still have a long road ahead of us to ensure the safety of the surrounding communities."

The Oregon fire, which was sparked by lightning, has ravaged the sparsely populated southern part of the state and had been expanding by up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day, pushed by strong winds and critically dry weather.

The blaze, which is being fought by more than 2,200 people, is now more than one-third contained.

On Thursday, authorities said at least nine people working the fire had tested positive for COVID-19.

The Oregon Department of Forestry said people who test positive are quarantined away from the main fire camp. Also, people who report symptoms and anyone who worked closely with them are tested and isolated until results are returned.

At least 2,000 homes were ordered evacuated at some point during the fire, and an additional 5,000 homes were threatened. At least 70 homes and more than 100 outbuildings have burned, but no one is known to have died.

Meanwhile the Tamarack Fire south of Lake Tahoe had burned more than 78 square miles (202 square kilometers) of timber and head-high chaparral in national forest land. It erupted July 4 and was one of nearly two dozen blazes sparked by lightning strikes.

Windy conditions were hampering more than 1,200 firefighters Thursday battling the Alpine County blaze. It has destroyed at least 10 buildings, forced evacuations in several communities and had closed parts of U.S. 395 in Nevada and California.

Bill Beidler, an evacuee from Woodfords, California, said: "We've been suppressing fires for so many generations, when we get one, this is what we get. Everything burns. People are losing their homes and everything."

Blowing embers from flames ignited a new spot fire Thursday afternoon that jumped the highway north of Topaz Lake on the California-Nevada line, prompting an evacuation order at Topaz Lake Estates and neighboring areas.

Fire officials reported later Thursday the spot fire that started east of the highway in winds gusting to 25 mph (40 kph) was "growing rapidly despite firefighters' diligent efforts to contain it."

"Firefighters on the ground and aircraft continue to battle the growing spot under exceptionally difficult weather and fuel condition," the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest said in an update.

It estimated the new blaze already had burned nearly 4 square miles (10 square kilometers). There were no immediate reports there of any injuries or structures destroyed.

To the northwest, the summer fun of boating and bathing came to an abrupt end for vacationers at Lake Almanor as the Dixie Fire spread up the west flank of the Sierra Nevada, expanding to more than 162 square miles. The west shore of the resort lake and many other small communities were under evacuation orders.

Meanwhile, Oregon on Wednesday banned all campfires on state-managed lands and in state campgrounds east of Interstate 5, the major highway that is commonly considered the dividing line between the wet western part of the state and the dry eastern half.

Extremely dry conditions and recent heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue

to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

## Violence, protests overshadow Mass for slain Haitian leader

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CAP-HAITIEN, Haiti (AP) — Demonstrations in Cap-Haitien turned violent on Thursday as gunshots rang out while supporters of slain President Jovenel Moïse blocked roads and demanded justice while threatening to disrupt his upcoming funeral.

A heavily armed police convoy carrying unknown officials rushed through a barricade of flaming tires set up at the end of a bridge, with one vehicle nearly flipping over as it passed through.

"This is real messed up since Jovenel died," said David Daniel, who stood in the doorway of a restaurant he co-owns as he watched the scene unfold. But he said he doesn't think the unrest will have the effect demonstrators intend. "Violence has been here in Haiti since I was a kid, so I don't think violence is going to change anything."

Earlier on Thursday, a priest told mourners at a memorial service Thursday that too much blood is being shed in Haiti as authorities warned of more violence ahead of his funeral.

The Rev. Jean-Gilles Sem spoke to dozens of people wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with Moïse's picture.

"The killings and kidnappings should stop," he said, noting that poor communities are the most affected. "We're tired."

The Mass at the cathedral in the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien was about half-full and Moïse supporters kept interrupting as they cried out and accused Haiti's elite of killing the president.

A man who identified himself as John Jovie stood outside the church with a group of men and threatened more violence if wealthy members of the elite from the capital of Port-au-Prince showed up for the ceremonies.

"We ask them not to come to the funeral," he said. "If they come, we will cut their heads off. We will bring our guns out of hiding. ...We want justice for Moïse."

The mayor of Cap-Haitien arrived at the cathedral with heavy security as men with high-powered weapons stood watch during the entire Mass.

Nearby, some people signed a blue condolences book that the mayor's office had set up next to the cathedral as well-wishers stood before a portrait of Moïse and rows of candles whose flames flickered in the hot wind.

"My President. Go in peace. God sees everything. Fight for change," wrote Louis Judlin, a 36-year-old electrician and father of two.

He said he is unemployed and struggles to find food to feed his children. "Life is truly hard for every Haitian. To eat, to go to school, to have health, transportation," Judlin said.

On Thursday evening, first lady Martine Moïse and her three children attended a small religious ceremony where government officials including newly installed Prime Minister Ariel Henry offered their condolences. It was her first public appearance since arriving in Cap-Haitien. She did not make any public comments.

The Mass was held a day after violence erupted in Quartier-Morin, located between Cap-Haitien and Moïse's hometown. Associated Press journalists saw the body of a man whom witnesses said was killed during the protests organized by armed men who blocked roads with large rocks and burning tires.

"That's the only way we have to demand justice," Aurélien Stanley, a Moïse supporter, said of the violence. "If we don't get justice for Jovenel, we will do whatever it takes to stop the funeral from happening."

Before the Mass began, several people stood at the entrance and shouted, "Justice for Moïse! Justice for Moïse!"

A private funeral for Moïse was planned for Friday as authorities continue to investigate the July 7 attack at the president's home, in which he was shot several times and his wife seriously wounded.

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department announced the appointment of Daniel Foote, a career member

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of the Foreign Service, as its special envoy for Haiti.

Footo will “engage with Haitian and international partners to facilitate long-term peace and stability and support efforts to hold free and fair presidential and legislative elections,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

Haiti’s police chief, Léon Charles, said 26 suspects have been arrested so far, including three police officers and 18 former Colombian soldiers. Another seven high-ranking police officials have been detained but not formally arrested as authorities probe why no one in the president’s security detail was injured that night.

## Vaccinations rise in some states with soaring infections

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

Vaccinations are beginning to rise in some states where COVID-19 cases are soaring, White House officials said Thursday in a sign that the summer surge is getting the attention of vaccine-hesitant Americans as hospitals in the South are being overrun with patients.

Coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients told reporters that several states with the highest proportions of new infections have seen residents get vaccinated at higher rates than the nation as a whole. Officials cited Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri and Nevada as examples.

“The fourth surge is real, and the numbers are quite frightening at the moment,” Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said on a New Orleans radio show. Edwards, a Democrat, added: “There’s no doubt that we are going in the wrong direction, and we’re going there in a hurry.”

Louisiana reported 2,843 new COVID-19 cases Thursday, a day after reporting 5,388 — the third-highest level since the pandemic began. Hospitalizations are up steeply in the last month, from 242 on June 19 to 913 in the latest report. Fifteen new deaths were reported Thursday.

Just 36% of Louisiana’s population is fully vaccinated, state health department data shows. Nationally, 56.3% of Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Aly Neel, a spokesperson for Louisiana’s health department, said the state has seen “a little bump” in vaccinations recently, adding that details would be available Friday.

Warner Thomas, president and CEO of the Ochsner Health system serving Louisiana and Mississippi, said the system had seen a 10% to 15% increase in people seeking vaccination over the past week or two. It has administered vaccines at churches, the New Orleans airport, basketball games and the mall.

“We see each person we get vaccinated now as a victory,” said Dr. Katherine Baumgarten, director of infection prevention and control for the 40-hospital system, noting that it has been bringing in traveling nurses and that projections show its ICUs could fill up at the current rate of infection.

Dr. Catherine O’Neal, chief medical officer and an infectious disease specialist at Our Lady of the Lake regional medical center, said Thursday that the most shocking aspect of the surge has been its speed. The caseload has roughly tripled in the course of a week, she said.

On Sunday, the medical center stopped taking transfers of coronavirus patients from hospitals in other parts of the state because they simply did not have the capacity, she said.

In Missouri, which is second only to Arkansas and Louisiana in the number of new cases per capita over the past 14 days, officials have rolled out a vaccine incentive program that includes \$10,000 prizes for 900 lottery winners. The state lags about 10 percentage points behind the national average for people who have received at least one shot.

Hospitals in the Springfield area are under strain, reaching pandemic high and near pandemic high numbers of patients.

“Younger, relatively healthy and unvaccinated. If this describes you, please consider vaccination,” tweeted Erik Frederick, chief administrative officer of Mercy Hospital Springfield, noting that half of the COVID-19 patients are ages 21 to 59 and just 2% of that group is vaccinated.

The surge that began in the southwest part of the state, where some counties have vaccination rates in the teens, has started to spread to the Kansas City area, including at Research Medical Center.

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"I don't want to keep putting my life on the line just because people don't want to get vaccinated or listen to what health care professionals are recommending," lamented Pascaline Muhindura, a registered nurse who has worked on the hospital's COVID-19 unit for more than a year.

"A lot of them don't even believe in COVID-19 to begin with. It is incredibly frustrating. You are helping someone that doesn't even believe that the illness that they have is real," Muhindura said.

Dr. Jason Wilson, an emergency physician with Tampa General Hospital, also has watched the rise in cases with frustration. Unlike earlier in the pandemic, when many patients were in their 70s, he has seen the median patient age fall to the mid-40s.

"I spent a lot of time this fall and last summer saying, 'We've got to do these things, these social mitigation strategies until we get that vaccine. Just hang in there,'" Wilson said.

Hospitals initially were hopeful as cases declined. But then, he said, "Things just fell flat."

Conservative Utah reported Wednesday that almost 300 people were hospitalized due to the virus — the highest number in five months. Intensive care units reached 81.5% capacity. Health officials renewed their pleas for residents to get vaccinated.

One of Arizona's biggest hospital systems issued its own call for vaccinations, citing an increase in seriously ill COVID-19 patients in just a few weeks. Dr. Michael White, of Valleywise Health, said doctors were mostly treating people with moderate symptoms, but that began to change two weeks ago. Now patients arrive acutely ill.

"This delta at the moment it is honing in on largely unvaccinated persons," said Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of infectious diseases in the health policy department at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville.

The variant, which originated in India, now accounts for an estimated 83% of coronavirus samples genetically identified in the U.S. It is the predominant strain in every region of the country and continues "spreading with incredible efficiency," the director of the CDC, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, told reporters at the White House.

She said the mutation is more aggressive and much more transmissible, calling it "one of the most infectious respiratory viruses we know of."

"We are yet at another pivotal moment in this pandemic," she warned. "We need to come together as one nation."

The CDC has not changed its guidance that vaccinated people do not need to wear masks. But in Georgia, Atlanta Public Schools announced Thursday that it will implement a "universal mask wearing" policy in all of the system's school buildings when fall classes begin.

Just 18% of eligible students in the Atlanta school system are fully vaccinated and 58% of its employees have said they are either fully vaccinated or plan to be, officials said.

"Given our low vaccination rates and increasing community spread, the CDC acknowledges that universal masking would be appropriate," the school system said in the statement.

In Arkansas, a group of Democratic lawmakers urged the governor and Republicans who control the Legislature to lift the state's ban on schools and local governments requiring people to wear masks.

## **EXPLAINER: Why Japan 'rising sun' flag provokes Olympic ire**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Japan considers the "rising sun" flag part of its history. But some in the Koreas, China and other Asian countries say the flag is a reminder of Japan's wartime atrocities, and is comparable to the Nazi swastika.

That's why the flag has created anger at the Olympics, with some of the host nation's neighbors calling for it to be banned during the Tokyo Games, which start Friday.

There's little prospect that ties between Seoul and Tokyo will improve any time soon. But the flag dispute may ease. Some experts say the COVID-19 restrictions that have banned spectators at most Olympic venues stadiums may prevent the disagreement from growing.



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Here's a look at the "rising sun" flag and the long-running unease it has caused in Northeast Asia.

## ORIGIN

There are two rising sun flags associated with Japan, whose very name in Japanese means "the sun's origin."

One is the country's national flag, called "nisshoki," or "hinomaru," which has a red disc on a white background. Few have a problem with this.

The other one also has a red disc, but it is surrounded by 16 rays that extend outward. Called "kyokujitsuki," this one has led to vehement protests from some of Japan's neighbors.

Both flags have been used for centuries. But disputes about the "rising sun" flag date back to the early part of the 20th century. That's when Japan's imperial navy used it as its official flag as the nation colonized the Korean Peninsula and invaded or occupied China and other Asian countries until its World War II defeat in 1945.

It's still Japan's navy flag, used by the Maritime Self-Defense Force and, in a slightly modified version, by the Ground-Self Defense Force since 1954.

These days, ultra-rightists in Japan often use the flag during rallies or on social media.

## CONFLICTING VIEWS

Japan's government emphasizes that both rising sun flags use the sun as a motif and were used across the country even before the wartime period. Even today, the rising sun with rays flag motif is used in everyday life in Japan, such as to celebrate a big catch by fishermen, childbirth and other festivities, the government says.

"An argument that it is a political statement or a symbol of militarism is completely irrelevant. I believe there is a big misunderstanding," now-Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said in 2013, when he served as chief cabinet secretary.

Japan's neighbors view it differently.

In 2019, South Korea formally requested that the International Olympic Committee ban the flag at the Tokyo Olympics. Seoul said that the flag recalls the "scars and pain" of Asian people who experienced Japan's wartime military aggression, similar to how the swastika "reminds Europeans of the nightmare of World War II."

North Korea's state media, not known for understatement, have accused Japan of trying to turn "the flag of war criminals" into a symbol of peace at the Olympics, saying that is "an intolerable insult to our people and other Asian people."

China is also highly sensitive to perceived slights from the Japanese government, individuals and companies. However, official outrage over history has diminished somewhat, while China's political, economic and cultural rivalry with the United States and European democracies has increased in recent years. When it comes to the flag, it's clearly less sensitive in China than in South Korea.

## USE AT THE GAMES

On Saturday, when South Korea removed banners at the Olympic athletes' village in Tokyo that the IOC ruled to be provocative, Seoul said it received an IOC promise that the displaying of the "rising sun" flag would also be banned at stadiums and other Olympic venues.

But South Korean media later reported that some activists carried the "rising sun" flag near the athletes' village. Media reports also said Japan's organizing committee ruled the flag isn't banned inside Olympic stadiums.

"It would be inappropriate to ban the flag from naval exchanges because a version is used by the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said. "However, you would not expect the Tokyo Olympics hosts or Japanese athletes to use the rising sun emblem because it is not the national flag."

Ties between Seoul and Tokyo, both U.S. allies, have suffered for years in part because of disputes over

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history and trade.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in's office announced Monday that Moon had decided not to visit Japan for the Olympics because the two countries failed to find enough common ground to support a leaders' summit.

## WILL THIS GET WORSE?

Some experts say the flag dispute isn't as serious as other points of contention, like Japan's wartime mobilization of Koreans into sexual slavery or forced labor, and won't likely worsen ties.

The flag dispute can still flare, however, if anger among anti-Japan civic groups in the South draw a backlash among the Japanese public, says Lee Myon-woo, deputy head of the private Sejong Institute near Seoul. Lee says South Korea should refrain from a "too excessive, political interpretation" of the flag because there is no sign that Japan is reviving past militarism.

But Bong Youngshik, a research fellow at Yonsei University Institute for North Korean Studies, says the flag wouldn't have become a major issue if Japan had accepted its neighbors' demands for making a more "sincere apology" over its wartime abuse.

The dispute may not have much kindling to fuel it, though, for one key reason: The lack of spectators at nearly all Olympics venues means no one is waving that flag — which means the dispute may die down for the time being.

## **GOP's vaccine push comes with strong words, few actions**

By JILL COLVIN and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican politicians are under increasing pressure to speak out to persuade COVID-19 vaccine skeptics to roll up their sleeves and take the shots as a new, more contagious variant sends caseloads soaring. But after months of ignoring — and, in some cases, stoking — misinformation about the virus, experts warn it may be too late to change the minds of many who are refusing.

In recent news conferences and statements, some prominent Republicans have been imploring their constituents to lay lingering doubts aside. In Washington, the so-called Doctors Caucus gathered at the Capitol for an event to combat vaccine hesitancy. And in Florida, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis this week pointed to data showing the vast majority of hospitalized COVID-19 patients hadn't received shots.

"These vaccines are saving lives," said DeSantis, who recently began selling campaign merchandise mocking masks and medical experts.

The outreach comes as COVID-19 cases have nearly tripled in the U.S. over the last two weeks, driven by the explosion of the new delta variant, especially in pockets of the country where vaccination rates are low. Public health officials believe the variant is at least twice as contagious as the original version, but the shots appear to offer robust protection against serious illness for most people.

Indeed, nearly all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are now people who haven't been vaccinated. Nonetheless, just 56.2% of Americans have received at least one vaccine dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overall, only 51% of Republicans said in mid-June that they had received at least one vaccine dose, versus 83% of Democrats, according to an AP-NORC poll. And many appeared to have made up their minds. Forty-six percent of those who had not been vaccinated said they definitely would not. Among Republicans, even more — 53% — said they definitely wouldn't; just 12% said they were planning to.

"I think they've finally realized that if their people aren't vaccinated, they're going to get sick, and if their people aren't vaccinated, they're going to get blamed for COVID outbreaks in the future," said GOP pollster Frank Luntz, who has been working with the Biden administration and public health experts to craft effective messaging to bring the vaccine hesitant off the fence.

But Luntz, who conducted another focus group Wednesday evening with vaccine holdouts, said there has been a discernible shift in recent weeks as skepticism has calcified into hardened refusal.

"The hesitation has transformed into opposition. And once you are opposed, it is very hard to change

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that position. And that's what's happening right now," he said.

For months now, many conservative lawmakers and pundits have been actively stoking vaccine hesitancy, refusing to take the shots themselves or downplaying the severity of the virus. Republican governors have signed bills protecting the unvaccinated from having to disclose their status and tried to roll back mask mandates. And on social media, disinformation has run rampant, leading President Joe Biden to claim platforms like Facebook were "killing people" — a claim he later walked back.

At a recent conservative gathering, attendees cheered the news that the Biden administration was falling short of its vaccination goals. Invoking the nation's top infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., warned, the government: "Don't come knocking on my door with your Fauci Ouchie! You leave us the hell alone."

Others, including former President Donald Trump, have repeatedly defended those who have chosen not to get vaccinated, stressing that the decision is a personal choice. Instead, they have pointed fingers at Democrats, suggesting they are to blame for the distrust.

"People are refusing to take the Vaccine because they don't trust (Biden's) Administration, they don't trust the Election results, and they certainly don't trust the Fake News," Trump said in a recent statement.

But there were signs that messaging was changing this week, as conservative leaders advocated for the shots. On Fox News, host Sean Hannity implored his viewers to "please take COVID seriously," saying, "Enough people have died." Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley on Twitter encouraged "ALL eligible Iowans/Americans to get vaccinated."

"The Delta variant scares me so I hope those that haven't been vaccinated will reconsider," he wrote.

Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the House Republican whip, distributed pictures of himself receiving his first dose of the vaccine last weekend after months of holding out.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, a polio survivor who has consistently advocated on behalf of the COVID-19 shots, this week urged the unvaccinated to ignore "all these other voices that are giving demonstrably bad advice."

But the news conference convened by House GOP leaders on Thursday highlighted Republicans' competing messages on the virus.

Initially billed as an event where Republican doctors in Congress would address the rapidly spreading delta variant, the group instead spent most of its time railing against China and making unverified claims that the coronavirus came from a lab leak in Wuhan, a theory initially popular in far-right circles but now being seriously considered by scientists. They also attacked Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Biden administration, for not doing more to get to the bottom of the lab leak theory.

"The question is, Why are Democrats stonewalling our efforts to uncover the origins of the COVID virus?" said New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No. 3 Republican in the House.

Eric Ward, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center who studies extremism, blamed vaccine reluctance on "nearly a year-and-a-half of right-wing rage machine rhetoric."

"Even conservative leaders now are having a hard time figuring out how to rein in what had primarily been a propaganda campaign, and they are now realizing their constituencies are particularly vulnerable," he said.

While some Republicans may be using strong words to promote the vaccine, few are proposing new measures to urge vaccination, such as incentives, public information campaigns or more aggressive outreach.

In New Hampshire, where shots have slowed to about 1,000 per week, Republican Gov. Chris Sununu said Thursday that there are no immediate plans to launch new initiatives.

"Right now, it's folks' individual responsibility. If someone hasn't been vaccinated at this point, they've made that conscious decision not to," he said. "The government's job is to provide that open door. If you want the vaccine, here it is, nice and easy. If you need more information, here it is. So you have every tool in the toolbox available to you and your family to make that decision."

Other Republicans continue to peddle falsehoods.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., was suspended from posting on Twitter for 12 hours earlier this week after spreading disinformation about vaccine-related deaths. And Charlie Kirk, the founder of Turn-

ing Point USA, a popular youth conservative advocacy group that last weekend hosted a conference that drew former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and numerous members of Congress, suggested without evidence on his podcast that up to 1.2 million could have died after getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

In his focus groups, Luntz said that many skeptics have struggled to assess the veracity of the things they read and hear.

"There is so much misinformation out there, and they can't tell the difference between what is accurate and what is fake," he said. "So it makes it virtually impossible to communicate when they don't know what to believe."

## US churches reckon with traumatic legacy of Native schools

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

The discoveries of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential schools for Indigenous children in Canada have prompted renewed calls for a reckoning over the traumatic legacy of similar schools in the United States — and in particular by the churches that operated many of them.

U.S. Catholic and Protestant denominations operated more than 150 boarding schools between the 19th and 20th centuries. Native American and Alaskan Native children were regularly severed from their tribal families, customs, language and religion and brought to the schools in a push to assimilate and Christianize them.

Some U.S. churches have been reckoning with this activity for years through ceremonies, apologies and archival investigations, while others are just getting started. Some advocates say churches have more work to do in opening their archives, educating the public about what was done in the name of their faith and helping former students and their relatives tell their stories of family trauma.

"We all need to work together on this," said the Rev. Bradley Hauff, a Minnesota-based Episcopal priest and missionary for Indigenous Ministries with the Episcopal Church.

"What's happening in Canada, that's a wakeup call to us," said Hauff, who is enrolled with the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

This painful history has drawn relatively little attention in the United States compared with Canada, where the recent discoveries of graves underscored what a 2015 government commission called a "cultural genocide."

That's beginning to change.

This month top officials with the U.S. Episcopal Church acknowledged the denomination's own need to reckon with its involvement with such boarding schools.

"We have heard with sorrow stories of how this history has harmed the families of many Indigenous Episcopalians," read a July 12 statement from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, president of the denomination's House of Deputies.

"We must come to a full understanding of the legacies of these schools," they added, calling for the denomination's next legislative session in 2022 to earmark funds for independent research into church archives and to educate church members.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a U.S. Cabinet secretary, announced last month that her department would investigate "the loss of human life and the lasting consequences of residential Indian boarding schools." That would include seeking to identify the schools and their burial sites.

Soon afterward, she spoke at a long-planned ceremony at the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, where the remains of nine children who died at the school more than a century earlier were returned to Rosebud Sioux tribal representatives for reburial in South Dakota.

U.S. religious groups were affiliated at least 156 such schools, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, formed in 2012 to raise awareness and address the traumas of the institutions. That's more than 40% of the 367 schools documented so far by the coalition.

Eighty-four were affiliated with the Catholic Church or its religious orders, such as the Jesuits. The other 72 were affiliated with various Protestant groups, including Presbyterians (21), Quakers (15) and Methodists (12). Most have been closed for decades.

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Samuel Torres, director of research and programs for the coalition, said church apologies can be a good start but "there is a lot more to be done" on engaging Indigenous community members and educating the public.

Such information is crucial given how little most Americans know about the schools, both in their impact on Indigenous communities and their role "as an armament toward acquisition of Native lands," he said.

"Without that truth, then there's really very limited possibilities of healing," said Torres, who is a descendant of Mexica/Nahua ancestors, an Indigenous group from present-day Mexico.

Hauff noted that the experiences of former students, such as his own parents, ranged widely. Some said that even amid austerity, loneliness and family separation, they received a good education, made friends, learned skills and freely spoke tribal languages with peers. But others talked of "unspeakable, cruel abuse," including physical and sexual assault, malnourishment and being punished for speaking Native languages.

"Even if some of the children did say they had a positive experience, it did come at a price," Hauff said. "Our church worked hand in hand with the government to assimilate these children. ... We need to acknowledge it happened."

In Canada, where more than 150,000 Indigenous children attended residential schools over more than a century, a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified 3,201 deaths amid poor conditions.

The United Church of Canada, which operated 15 such schools, has apologized for its role, opened its archives and helped identify burial sites.

The Rev. Richard Bott, moderator of the United Church, lamented that "we were perpetrators in this" and that the church "put the national goal of assimilation ahead of our responsibility as Christians."

The Catholic Church's response in Canada remains controversial. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in June that he was "deeply disappointed" the Vatican has not offered a formal apology. Pope Francis expressed "sorrow" following the discovery of the graves and has agreed to meet at the Vatican in December with school survivors and other Indigenous leaders.

Canada's Catholic bishops said in a joint statement this month that they are "saddened by the Residential Schools legacy." In Saskatchewan, bishops have launched a fundraising campaign to benefit survivors and other reconciliation efforts.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, meanwhile, said it would "look for ways to be of assistance" in the Interior Department's inquiry.

"We cannot even begin to imagine the deep sorrow these discoveries are causing in Native communities across North America," spokeswoman Chieko Noguchi said.

Influential voices such as the Jesuit-affiliated America Magazine are urging U.S. Catholic bishops not to repeat their mishandling of cases of child sex abuse by priests and other religious leaders.

"For decades the people of God were anguished by the obfuscation on the part of those church leaders who allowed only a trickle of incomplete document releases from diocesan and provincial archives while investigators struggled to get to the truth," the magazine said in an editorial. "The church in the United States must demonstrate that it has learned from ... such failures."

Individual efforts are underway, however, such as at the Red Cloud Indian School in South Dakota, which has formed a Truth and Healing Advisory Committee to reckon with the years it was managed by Catholic orders.

Other churches have addressed their legacy to varying degrees.

Early in 2017, leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) traveled to Utqiagvik, on Alaska's North Slope, to deliver a sweeping apology before a packed school auditorium for the treatment of Indigenous persons in general, and specifically for how it operated the boarding schools.

The Rev. Gradye Parsons, former stated clerk for the denomination, told the gathering that the church had been "in contempt of its own proclaimed faith" in suppressing Native spiritual traditions amid its zeal to spread Christianity, and "the church judged when it should have listened."

"It has taken us too long to get to this apology," Parsons said. "Many of your people who deserved the apology the most are gone."

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The United Methodist Church held a ceremony of repentance in 2012 for historic injustices against Native peoples, and in 2016 it acknowledged its role in the boarding schools in tandem with a government effort to "intentionally" destroy traditional cultures and belief systems.

Still, the Native American International Caucus of the United Methodist Church recently urged the church to do more "to uncover the truth about our denomination's role and responsibility in this reprehensible history."

## **Dems renew questions about FBI background check of Kavanaugh**

BY ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats are raising new concerns about the thoroughness of the FBI's background investigation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh after the FBI revealed that it had received thousands of tips and had provided "all relevant" ones to the White House counsel's office.

FBI Director Christopher Wray, responding to longstanding questions from Democrats, disclosed in a letter late last month that it had received more than 4,500 tips as it investigated the nominee's past following his 2018 nomination by President Donald Trump. The process was the first time that the FBI had set up a tip line for a nominee undergoing Senate confirmation, Wray said.

A group of Democratic senators said in a letter to Wray dated Wednesday that his response "raises significant additional questions." They called on him to explain, among other things, how many tips the FBI decided were relevant and what criteria agents used to make that determination and what policies and procedures were used to vet the tips. The senators also asked for more information about the tip line, including how it was staffed and how the tips were recorded or preserved.

"Your letter confirms that the FBI's tip line was a departure from past practice and that the FBI was politically constrained by the Trump White House," the senators wrote.

Kavanaugh was confirmed to the Supreme Court in October 2018 after a rancorous process in which claims emerged that he had sexually assaulted women three decades ago. He emphatically denied the allegations.

The FBI conducted a original background investigation into Kavanaugh that consisted of interviews with 49 people over the course of five days, Wray said. The bureau then did a supplemental background check after new information arose about a woman, Christine Blasey Ford, who alleged that Kavanaugh had assaulted her when they were teens. As part of that process, Wray said, the FBI interviewed 10 people over six days.

But, he stressed, the inquiry was limited in nature, without the "authorities, policies and procedures" that would be used for an FBI criminal investigation.

Lawyers for Ford said in a statement that the FBI's letter established that the investigation was a "sham and a major institutional failure" and chastised the bureau for not interviewing Ford or acting on the thousands of tips it received about Kavanaugh.

"Instead, it handed the information over to the White House, allowing those who supported Kavanaugh to falsely claim that the FBI found no wrongdoing," said the lawyers, Debra Katz and Lisa Banks.

## **Kaseya gets master decryption key after July 4 global attack**

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The Florida company whose software was exploited in the devastating Fourth of July weekend ransomware attack, Kaseya, has received a universal key that will decrypt all of the more than 1,000 businesses and public organizations crippled in the global incident.

Kaseya spokeswoman Dana Liedholm would not say Thursday how the key was obtained or whether a ransom was paid. She said only that it came from a "trusted third party" and that Kaseya was distributing it to all victims. The cybersecurity firm Emsisoft confirmed that the key worked and was providing support.

Ransomware analysts offered multiple possible explanations for why the master key, which can unlock

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the scrambled data of all the attack's victims, has now appeared. They include: Kaseya paid; a government paid; a number of victims pooled funds; the Kremlin seized the key from the criminals and handed it over through intermediaries — or perhaps the main attacker didn't get paid by the gang whose ransomware was used.

The Russia-linked criminal syndicate that supplied the malware, REvil, disappeared from the internet on July 13. That likely deprived whoever carried out the attack of income because such affiliates split ransoms with the syndicates that lease them the ransomware. In the Kaseya attack, the syndicate was believed overwhelmed by more ransom negotiations than it could manage, and decided to ask \$50 million to \$70 million for a master key that would unlock all infections.

By now, many victims will have rebuilt their networks or restored them from backups.

It's a mixed bag, Liedholm said, because some "have been in complete lockdown." She had no estimate of the cost of the damage and would not comment on whether any lawsuits may have been filed against Kaseya. It is not clear how many victims may have paid ransoms before REvil went dark.

The so-called supply-chain attack of Kaseya was the worst ransomware attack to date because it spread through software that companies known as managed service providers use to administer multiple customer networks, delivering software updates and security patches.

President Joe Biden called his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, afterward to press him to stop providing safe haven for cybercriminals whose costly attacks the U.S. government deems a national security threat. He has threatened to make Russia pay a price for failing to crack down, but has not specified what measures the U.S. may take.

If the universal decryptor for the Kaseya attack was turned over without payment, it would not be the first time ransomware criminals have done that. It happened after the Conti gang hobbled Ireland's national health care service in May and the Russian Embassy in Dublin offered "to help with the investigation."

## Milwaukee Bucks' fans celebrate NBA championship with parade

By GRETCHEN EHLKE Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Thousands of fans lined downtown Milwaukee streets on Thursday to catch a glimpse of their beloved Bucks in a parade to celebrate the city's first NBA championship in half a century.

Six police officers on horseback clopped past cheering fans at the head of a procession that included a hook-and-ladder fire truck, occasionally blaring its horn, and open-air buses and flatbed trucks carrying Bucks stars including Finals MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo and Jrue Holiday, as well as the trophy they captured Tuesday night with a Game 6 victory over Phoenix.

Fans could be heard chanting, "Bucks in 6," an odd but popular rallying cry with roots in a former Bucks player's fruitless prediction in 2013 that the team would take down the playoffs' top seed at the time.

Antetokounmpo held his son, 1-year-old Liam, atop a bus as fans along the route chanted "MVP!" Later, he shot a basketball into the crowd.

"Milwaukee, we did it baby! We did it!" Antetokounmpo said to a cheering crowd in the Deer District, the area outside the Bucks' Fiserv Forum. "This is our city, this is our city, man, we did it! Unbelievable."

Neil and Rachana Bhatia, both 34 and from suburban Waukesha, brought 1-month-old son Zain to the Deer District, saying they wanted to give Zain an early taste of being a Bucks fan.

Neil Bhatia called winning the title "surreal."

"It unifies the city and puts the city on a global stage. It's great for the city and the state. It's just bringing everybody together to celebrate something that hasn't happened in 50 years," he said.

"The city has had its struggles. What I know is that it's been a city that's coming together," said long-time Bucks fan Dameon Ellzey, 45, a Milwaukee native who lives near the arena and was stationed there to see the parade.

"In my neighborhood, you could hear everybody on their porches screaming," Ellzey said. "Black, white, Asian. In a city like Milwaukee, that's big."

Milwaukee has long ranked among the most segregated cities in America. Team President Peter Feigin

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called it “the most segregated, racist place” he’d ever experienced, remarks he later softened. As the Bucks drove toward a championship this year, some people were cheered by the diversity of the massive crowds that gathered in the Deer District to watch the Bucks on big TV screens.

The team’s ascendance has invigorated a Midwestern city far from the league’s more cosmopolitan venues like Los Angeles, Boston or Miami — cities that have traditionally found it easier to attract the game’s top players. One reason fans have embraced Antetokounmpo is his loyalty to the team that drafted him eight years ago when he was just 18.

“He recognizes the city and its quality and he resonates with it,” Timothy Seymour, 20, said of Antetokounmpo. “He really reflects our work ethic. He works hard. And he reflects how we’re only going to get better.”

Police estimated 100,000 people jammed the Deer District for Tuesday night’s Game 6. Though the coronavirus pandemic has lessened compared to a year ago, the level of cases in both Wisconsin and Milwaukee County still is rated by the state as high, with daily new cases in the county roughly tripling over the past two weeks to 80 per day.

City health officials noted Thursday that announcements of the parade had urged that unvaccinated people wear masks. Few were visible among fans on the parade route or later outside the arena. The city health department said their contact tracing team would closely monitor the event.

Julie Willems Van Dijk, deputy secretary of the state Department of Health Services, predicted the two large gatherings would lead to more COVID-19 cases.

“We are concerned,” she said. “We know people wanted to be jubilant and celebrate. But we know, half the state is fully vaccinated and half the state is not and I assume the same is true for people in the Deer District and the arena. And I didn’t see half the crowd masked.”

## **EXPLAINER: As wildfire smoke spreads, who’s at risk?**

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Smoke from wildfires in the western U.S. and Canada is blanketing much of the continent, including thousands of miles away on the East Coast. And experts say the phenomenon is becoming more common as human-caused global warming stokes bigger and more intense blazes.

Pollution from smoke reached unhealthy levels this week in communities from Washington state to Washington D.C.

Get used to it, researchers say.

“These fires are going to be burning all summer,” said University of Washington wildfire smoke expert Dan Jaffe. “In terms of bad air quality, everywhere in the country is to going to be worse than average this year.”

Growing scientific research points to potential long-term health damage from breathing in microscopic particles of smoke. Authorities have scrambled to better protect people from the harmful effects but face challenges in communicating risk to vulnerable communities and people who live very far away from burning forests.

**WHY SO MUCH SMOKE AND HOW DANGEROUS IS IT?**

Decades of aggressive fire fighting allowed dead trees and other fuels to build up in forests. Now climate change is drying the landscape, making it easier for fires to ignite and spread even as more people move into fire-prone areas.

The number of unhealthy air quality days recorded in 2021 by pollution monitors nationwide is more than double the number to date in each of the last two years, according to figures provided to the Associated Press by the Environmental Protection Agency. Wildfires likely are driving much of the increase, officials said.

The amount of smoke wildfires spew stems directly from how much land burns — more than 4,100 square miles (10,600 square kilometers) in the U.S. and 4,800 square miles (12,500 square kilometers) in Canada so far in 2021. That’s behind the 10-year average for this time of year for both nations, but forecasters warn conditions could worsen as a severe drought afflicting 85% of the West intensifies.



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Wildfire smoke contains hundreds of chemical compounds, and many can be harmful in large doses. Health officials use the concentration of smoke particles in the air to gauge the severity of danger to the public.

In bad fire years over the past decade, infernos across the West emitted more than a million tons of the particles annually, according to U.S. Forest Service research.

Scientists link smoke exposure with long-term health problems including decreased lung function, weakened immune systems and higher rates of flu. In the short term, vulnerable people can be hospitalized and sometimes die from excessive smoke, according to physicians and public health officials.

When communities burn, the smoke can be especially hazardous. The 2018 fire in Paradise, California that killed 85 people and torched 14,000 houses also generated a thick plume blanketing portions of Northern California for weeks. Smoke from burning houses and buildings contains more toxic plastics and other manufactured materials as well as chemicals stored in garages.

## WHERE ARE THE FIRES?

More than 60 large wildfires are now burning out of control across the U.S., including 17 in Montana. The largest — eastern Oregon's Bootleg fire — has grown to 624 square miles (1,616 square kilometers). That's half the size of Rhode Island, yet fewer than 200 houses and other structures have been confirmed as lost because the fire is burning in a sparsely populated area.

More than 200 fires are burning in Manitoba and Ontario, according to Canadian officials.

Weather patterns and fire intensity determine who gets hit by smoke. Huge fires generate so much heat that they can produce their own clouds that funnel smoke high into the atmosphere.

"It just carries across the country and slowly spreads out, forming sort of this haze layer in the sky," said meteorologist Miles Bliss with the National Weather Service in Medford, Oregon.

The combined plume from Canada and the U.S. largely passed over parts of the Midwest this week before settling to ground level across an area that stretches from Ohio northeast to New England and south to the Carolinas, air pollution data shows.

Health effects can occur thousands of miles from the flames. The smoke loses its tell-tale odor but remains a potential hazard even when it drifts that far, said Jeff Pierce, an atmospheric scientist at Colorado State University.

"It's certainly unhealthy," Pierce said of the air along the East Coast in recent days. "If you have asthma or any sort of respiratory condition, you want to be thinking about changing your plans if you're going to be outside."

People who live close to fires are more likely to be prepared and take precautions, while those who live farther away unwittingly remain exposed, according to a recent study by Colorado State University epidemiologist Sheryl Magzamen and Pierce.

## HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF?

Listen for warnings about smoke and, if advised, avoid outdoor activities to reduce exposure. Keep doors and windows closed, and run an air filter to clean inside air. Face masks can protect against breathing in smoke. As with COVID-19, most effective are N95 masks because they are designed to block the smallest particles.

An online, interactive smoke map launched by the EPA and the U.S. Forest Service last year on a pilot basis has drawn millions of viewers. To reach people more quickly, officials are considering using mobile phone push notifications that would alert users when heavy smoke could inundate their communities, according to agency spokeswoman Enesta Jones.

## NFL teams face potential forfeits for COVID-19 outbreaks

By ROB MAADDI and BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writers

NFL teams that experience a COVID-19 outbreak among nonvaccinated players could forfeit regular-season games, with players on both teams not getting paid.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell warned the 32 teams Thursday in a memo obtained by The Associated Press that no games would be rescheduled under such circumstances. Instead, forfeits could happen.

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"As we learned last year, we can play a full season if we maintain a firm commitment to adhering to our health and safety protocols and to making needed adjustments in response to changing conditions," Goodell said.

He added that the league does not anticipate adding a 19th week to accommodate games that need to be moved because of coronavirus issues.

"If a game can't be rescheduled and is canceled due to a COVID outbreak among non-vaccinated players on one of the competing teams, the team with the outbreak will forfeit and will be deemed to have played 16 games for purposes of draft, waiver priority, etc," Goodell added.

For purposes of playoff seeding, the forfeiting team would be assessed a loss and the other team a win.

If there is a virus outbreak because of a "spike in vaccinated individuals, we will attempt to minimize the competitive and economic burden on both participating teams," the memo said.

The NFL has not made vaccinations mandatory. The league and the NFL Players Association, however, are strongly urging team employees and players to do so.

Last year, in the height of the pandemic, the NFL completed its season, the playoffs and Super Bowl on time. But it had contingency plans for an 18th week to play makeup games if needed. There were several postponements but no cancellations.

For the 2021, the regular season has been expanded to 17 games.

The league says more than half its teams currently have COVID-19 vaccination rates greater than 80% of their players, and more than 75% of players are in the process of being vaccinated. All training camps will be open by the end of next week.

Nearly all clubs have vaccinated 100% of their Tier 1 and 2 staffs — essentially players, coaches and other club members who have direct contact with the players. Teams have appropriate protocols set up for staffers who have not been vaccinated, consistent with the guidance given last April.

The players' union, in response to Goodell's memo, reminded its players that "the same basic rules applied last year."

"The only difference this year is the NFL's decision to impose additional penalties on clubs which are responsible for the outbreak and the availability of proven vaccines," the NFLPA memo said Thursday.

"The protocols we jointly agreed to helped get us through a full season last year without missing game checks and are effective, when followed."

Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott, who was stricken with the coronavirus last year, called getting the vaccine "a touchy subject," though he added he has been vaccinated.

"You can't really tell someone what to do with their body," Elliott said at Cowboys training camp. "I grew up in a family where we didn't get vaccines so it's kind of hard to tell someone who their whole life their mom and dad tell them not to get vaccines to go get vaccinated. So I mean I don't know, it's everyone's body, you can't tell them what to do."

As for potential forfeits, he added:

"A check is only monetary, you can't put a price on someone's health or what they think will make them feel good or not make them feel good. Like I said, you're kind of walking a tight line. "

Other key points in the league's memo:

— If a vaccinated person tests positive and is not symptomatic, he or she will be isolated and contact tracing will promptly occur. The positive individual will be permitted to return to duty after two negative tests at least 24 hours apart, and will thereafter be tested every two weeks or as directed by the medical staffs. Vaccinated individuals will not be subject to quarantine as a result of close contact with an infected person.

— If an unvaccinated person tests positive, the protocols from 2020 will remain in effect. The person will be isolated for a period of 10 days and will then be permitted to return to duty if not symptomatic. Unvaccinated individuals will continue to be subject to a five-day quarantine period if they have close contact with an infected individual.

— Those who had a previous COVID-19 infection will be considered fully vaccinated 14 days after they

have had at least one dose of an approved vaccine.

## **Pelosi says 'deadly serious' Jan. 6 probe to go without GOP**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Unfazed by Republican threats of a boycott, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared Thursday that a congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection will take on its “deadly serious” work whether Republicans participate or not.

The Republicans’ House leader, Kevin McCarthy, called the committee a “sham process” and suggested that GOP lawmakers who take part could face consequences. McCarthy said Pelosi’s rejection of two of the Republicans he had attempted to appoint was an “egregious abuse of power.”

The escalating tension between the two parties — before the investigation has even started — is emblematic of the raw partisan anger that has only worsened on Capitol Hill since former President Donald Trump’s supporters laid siege to the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden’s victory. With most Republicans still loyal to Trump, and many downplaying the severity of the violent attack, there is little bipartisan unity to be found.

McCarthy said Wednesday that he would withdraw the names of all five Republicans he had appointed after Pelosi rejected two of them, Reps. Jim Banks of Indiana and Jim Jordan of Ohio. Pelosi made clear on Thursday that she won’t relent, and Democrats mulled filling the empty seats themselves.

“It is my responsibility as the speaker of the House to make sure we get to the truth of this, and we will not let their antics stand in the way of that,” Pelosi said of the Republicans.

It is unclear, for now, whether Pelosi will try to appoint more members to the select panel, as she has the authority to do under committee rules. She left open that possibility, saying that there are other members who would like to participate. But she said she hadn’t decided whether to appoint Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, one of only two Republicans who voted in support of creating the panel last month.

The other, Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, has already been appointed by Pelosi to sit on the committee along with seven Democrats — ensuring they have a quorum to proceed, whether other Republicans participate or not.

Cheney praised Kinzinger, saying he would be a “tremendous addition” to the panel. Several Democrats on the panel also seemed to support the idea, with Chairman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi saying the military veteran is a “the kind of person we’d want to have.”

Banks and Jordan are outspoken allies of Trump, who has continued to spread lies about massive fraud in the election and has defended his supporters who broke into the Capitol. The rioters fought past police and sent lawmakers inside running for their lives.

The House voted in May to create an independent investigation that would have been evenly split between the parties, but Senate Republicans blocked that approach in a vote last month. Pelosi said the new panel was being created only because a bipartisan commission was no longer an option.

Asked Thursday if Cheney — and potentially Kinzinger — could be stripped of their regular committee assignments as retaliation for participating, McCarthy said “the conference will look at it.” Cheney accepted the assignment from Pelosi earlier this month despite similar threats from McCarthy.

Pelosi accepted McCarthy’s three other picks — Illinois Rep. Rodney Davis, North Dakota Rep. Kelly Armstrong and Texas Rep. Troy Nehls. But McCarthy said that all five or none would participate.

Like Jordan and Banks, Nehls voted to overturn Biden’s victory. Armstrong and Davis voted to certify the election.

Banks recently traveled with Trump to the U.S.-Mexico border and visited him at his New Jersey golf course. In a statement after McCarthy chose him for the panel, he sharply criticized the Democrats who had set it up.

“Make no mistake, Nancy Pelosi created this committee solely to malign conservatives and to justify the left’s authoritarian agenda,” Banks said.

Democrats whom Pelosi appointed to the committee earlier this month were angry over that statement,

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and concerned over Banks' two recent visits with Trump, according to a senior Democratic aide familiar with the private deliberations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss them.

Jordan, the top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, was one of Trump's most vocal defenders during his two impeachments and last month likened the new investigation to "impeachment three." Trump was impeached by the House and acquitted by the Senate both times.

The panel is also considering hiring former Rep. Denver Riggleman of Virginia, a Republican who has criticized Trump's lies about election fraud, as an outside adviser, according to a person familiar with the committee's work who was granted anonymity to discuss the private talks.

Cheney told reporters she agrees with Pelosi's decision to reject the two Republicans named by McCarthy. "At every opportunity, the minority leader has attempted to prevent the American people from understanding what happened — to block this investigation," Cheney said.

The panel will hold its first hearing next week, with at least four police officers who battled rioters testifying about their experiences. Members of the committee met Thursday afternoon to prepare.

Thompson said the hearing would allow the law enforcement officers to tell their stories and "set the tone" for the investigation's launch.

Seven people died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and later died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner determined he died of natural causes.

## Norway mourns 77 slain a decade ago in extremist attack

By DAVID KEYTON and MARK LEWIS Associated Press

OSLO, Norway (AP) — Church bells rang out across Norway on Thursday to mark the 10th anniversary of the country's worst peacetime slaughter as leaders called for renewed efforts to fight the extremism behind the attack that left 77 people dead.

Norway was united in "shock, grief and anger," said King Harald, speaking at an evening memorial service where he apologized that not enough was done to curb what he called "the dark forces" in society.

On July 22, 2011, right-wing extremist Anders Breivik set off a bomb in the capital of Oslo, killing eight people. Then he headed to tiny Utoya island, where he stalked the mostly teen members of the Labor Party's youth wing, killing another 69.

Memorials were held across the country, including a service in Oslo Cathedral that ended with a ringing of bells as thousands gathered outside.

The 84-year-old monarch arrived at the cathedral on crutches and took his seat for the service beside Queen Sonja for a minute of silence.

Jens Stoltenberg, who was prime minister at the time of the attack, told the congregation that "10 years ago, we met hatred with love, but the hatred is still there."

"The perpetrator was a right-wing extremist. He misused Christian symbols. He grew up in our streets, belonged to the same religion and had the same skin color as the majority in this country. He was one of us," Stoltenberg said, speaking in front of 77 roses that were arranged in the shape of a heart.

"But he is not one of us, who respects democracy. He is one of those who believe they have the right to kill for their political objectives," he added.

At an evening service, Harald said he hoped Norwegians "can help each other live the lessons from July 22 every day, in everything we are and do."

"At the same time, we must acknowledge that we as a society have not done nearly enough to see, to help, to carry the burden together, and to counteract the dark forces," the king said. "I am sorry about this."

Earlier in the day, emotional survivors read aloud the names of the victims.

Some parents of the victims reflected on how the country has coped since the massacre, saying that "time does not heal all wounds."

"What would those who were so brutally and unfairly killed think of us now 10 years later? I think they

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would be sad to know that there still are survivors and bereaved with great needs," said Lisbeth Kristine Roeyneland, whose daughter, Synne, was killed by Breivik. Roeyneland runs the national support group for victims and families.

"I think they would be disappointed in seeing the public debate in many ways has moved in the wrong direction," she added. "I also think they would be proud of us. Proud of how we reacted in the days after the terrorist attack and how our state under the rule of law firmly stood its ground in the face of brutality."

Astrid Hoem, a survivor from Utoya who leads the AUF, the youth wing of the center-left Labor Party, said, "We have not stopped the hatred," and urged Norway to face up to the racism in the country.

"It is so brutal that it can be difficult to fathom," Hoem said. "But it's our responsibility to do so. Because 10 years on, we must speak the truth. We haven't stopped the hatred. Far-right extremism is still alive. The terrorist was one of us."

She spoke to a group of mourners, including Crown Prince Haakon, Prime Minister Erna Solberg, survivors and families of the victims.

Solberg said it hurt to think back "on that dark July day" and added: "We must not leave hate unchallenged."

"The terror attack on the 22nd of July was an attack on our democracy," said Solberg, who has been prime minister since 2013. "It was a politically motivated terrorist act towards the Labor Party, AUF and their ideas. But it wasn't just an attack on a political movement. A whole nation was struck. But we rose again. But Norway was changed by an experience which still causes pain."

At a commemorative event on Utoya, Haakon said Norwegians must work together to fight right-wing extremism.

"It is our personal and collective responsibility to work against these forces every day," he said.

Small boats dotted the water around the island, a reminder of attempts by many residents to rescue people 10 years ago while Breivik fired toward them.

Dignitaries laid flowers at a memorial, inscribed with the names of 69 victims who were killed on the island.

The flowers have become a symbol of the country's response to the attack, when roses were piled outside Oslo Cathedral in the days after the slaughter.

## Amazon's mission: Getting a 'key' to your apartment building

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon is tired of ringing doorbells.

The online shopping giant is pushing landlords around the country — sometimes with financial incentives — to give its drivers the ability to unlock apartment-building doors themselves with a mobile device.

The service, dubbed Key for Business, is pitched as a way to cut down on stolen packages by making it easy to leave them in lobbies and not outside. Amazon benefits because it enables delivery workers to make their rounds faster. And fewer stolen packages reduce costs and could give Amazon an edge over competitors.

Those who have installed the device say it reduces the constant buzzing by delivery people and is a safer alternative to giving out codes to scores of delivery people.

But the Amazon program, first announced in 2018, may stir security and privacy concerns as it gains traction. The company said that it does background checks on delivery people and that they can unlock doors only when they have a package in hand to scan. But tenants may not know that Amazon drivers have access to their building's front doors, since Amazon leaves it up to the building to notify them.

Ashkan Soltani, a privacy researcher who was a senior tech advisor to former President Barack Obama, said that any device connected to the internet could be hacked, including the Amazon one, and bad actors could try to unlock the doors.

"You're essentially introducing a foreign internet-connected device into an otherwise internal network," said Soltani, who was also a former chief technologist at the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

Amazon didn't respond to questions about potential hacking.

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The company has already installed the device in thousands of U.S. apartment buildings but declined to give a specific number. It sometimes leaves a clue, placing a round sticker with the Amazon smile logo on buzzers where the device has been installed. On one New York City street, the sticker was on three of 11 buildings. In another neighborhood, two of seven buildings had the sticker.

Amazon salespeople have been fanning out to cities across the country to knock on doors, make cold calls or approach building managers on the street to urge them to install the device. The company has even partnered with local locksmiths to push it on building managers while they fix locks. Amazon installs the device for free and sometimes throws in a \$100 Amazon gift card to whoever lets them in.

Soltani said he learned about Key for Business when he was approached by two Amazon salespeople in April who wanted access to the building where he lives in Oakland, California. Building management declined, and no device was installed.

Amazon had better luck with Kenton Girard. A Chicago landlord, Girard agreed to have the device installed in four of his buildings as a way to reduce package theft, which was getting so bad that he was considering building a package drop box outside.

"I would have paid to have it done," Girard said of the Amazon device.

Currently, only the U.S. Postal Service has a way to enter apartment buildings in order to get to mailboxes. UPS says it has tested a way for its workers to enter buildings without buzzing tenants, teaming up with a smart-lock company in 2018. But that test ended, and UPS declined to say why. The company says customers can instead have their packages delivered to nearby grocery stores, dry cleaners or florists if they're not home.

FedEx declined to comment for this story.

Amazon has wanted to walk through people's front doors for years. In 2017, it launched a way for shoppers to let delivery people come in their home when they're not there and leave packages in the foyer. Walmart did the same shortly after, but its delivery people also stocked the fridge with groceries. Amazon and Walmart don't say how many people are using those services, but both have expanded them to more cities recently.

In 2018, Amazon set its sights on apartment buildings, launching Key for Business and signing up big landlords to install the device in their developments. But the push seems to have accelerated in the last year or so, with Amazon deploying salespeople nationwide. Recent job postings in Miami and San Antonio say Amazon salespeople can make \$3,000 to \$11,000 a month in bonuses and commissions. Amazon won't say how much it's spending on the effort.

Not all Amazon packages can get through front doors. The company delivers about 60% of its own packages itself, according to shopping data firm Rakuten Intelligence; the rest come through other delivery companies that can't let themselves in.

Philip T. Evers, a logistics professor at University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business, said Amazon's desire to get the device into as many buildings as possible may be a way to keep competitors out.

"The landlord may say, 'You know, I'll do this for one company, but maybe we don't want it for every delivery company that's out there,'" he said. He added that Amazon could find other uses for the service, like having delivery people pick up returns left in the lobby instead of making shoppers schlep to the post office. Amazon declined to share any future plans.

Jason Goldberg, chief commerce strategy officer at marketing company Publicis Communications, said the device could save Amazon money, since workers can drop off more packages during a shift and may have to offer fewer refunds to those whose packages were stolen.

He heard about the program in December, when a locksmith replacing the buzzer system at his Chicago condo building offered to install Amazon Key for Business for free. Goldberg, who helps manage the building, later allowed Amazon salespeople — dangling a \$100 Amazon gift card — to install the device.

"They give it away for free because it benefits Amazon more than us," Goldberg said.

## Death rates soar in Southeast Asia as virus wave spreads

By DAVID RISING and EILEEN NG Associated Press

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KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Indonesia has converted nearly its entire oxygen production to medical use just to meet the demand from COVID-19 patients struggling to breathe. Overflowing hospitals in Malaysia had to resort to treating patients on the floor. And in Myanmar's largest city, graveyard workers have been laboring day and night to keep up with the grim demand for new cremations and burials.

Images of bodies burning in open-air pyres during the peak of the pandemic in India horrified the world in May, but in the last two weeks the three Southeast Asian nations have now all surpassed India's peak per capita death rate as a new coronavirus wave, fueled by the virulent delta variant, tightens its grip on the region.

The deaths have followed record numbers of new cases being reported in countries across the region which have left health care systems struggling to cope and governments scrambling to implement new restrictions to try to slow the spread.

When Eric Lam tested positive for COVID-19 and was hospitalized on June 17 in the Malaysian state of Selangor, the center of the country's outbreak, the corridors of the government facility were already crowded with patients on beds with no room left in the wards.

The situation was still better than in some other hospitals in Selangor, Malaysia's richest and most populous state, where there were no free beds at all and patients were reportedly treated on floors or on stretchers. The government has since added more hospital beds and converted more wards for COVID-19 patients.

Lam, 38, recalled once during his three weeks in the hospital hearing a machine beeping continuously for two hours before a nurse came to turn it off; he later learned the patient had died.

A variety of factors have contributed to the recent surge in the region, including people growing weary of the pandemic and letting precautions slip, low vaccination rates and the emergence of the delta variant of the virus, which was first detected in India, said Abhishek Rimal, the Asia-Pacific emergency health coordinator for the Red Cross, who is based in Malaysia.

"With the measures that countries are taking, if people follow the basics of washing the hands, wearing the masks, keeping distance and getting vaccinated, we will be seeing a decline in cases in the next couple of weeks from now," he said.

So far, however, Malaysia's national lockdown measures have not brought down the daily rate of infections. The country of some 32 million saw daily cases rise above 10,000 on July 13 for the first time and they have stayed there since.

The vaccination rate remains low but has been picking up, with nearly 15% of the population now fully inoculated and the government hoping to have a majority vaccinated by year's end.

Doctors and nurses have been working tirelessly to try to keep up, and Lam was one of the fortunate ones.

After his condition initially deteriorated, he was put on a ventilator in an ICU unit filled to capacity and slowly recovered. He was discharged two weeks ago.

But he lost his father and brother-in-law to the virus, and another brother remains on a ventilator in the ICU.

"I feel I have been reborn and given a second chance to live," he said.

With India's massive population of nearly 1.4 billion people, its total number of COVID-19 fatalities remains higher than the countries in Southeast Asia. But India's 7-day rolling average of COVID-19 deaths per million peaked at 3.04 in May, according to the online scientific publication Our World in Data, and continues to decline.

Indonesia, Myanmar, and Malaysia have been showing sharp increases since late June and their seven-day averages hit 4.37, 4.29 and 4.14 per million, respectively, on Wednesday. Cambodia and Thailand have also seen strong increases in both coronavirus cases and deaths, but have thus far held the seven-day rate per million people to a lower 1.55 and 1.38, respectively.

Individual countries elsewhere have higher rates, but the increases are particularly alarming for a region that widely kept numbers low early in the pandemic.

With the Indian experience as a lesson, most countries have reacted relatively quickly with new restrictions to slow the virus, and to try to meet the needs of the burgeoning number of people hospitalized

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with severe illnesses, Rimal said.

"People in this region are cautious, because they have seen it right in front of them — 400,000 cases a day in India — and they really don't want it to repeat here," he said in a telephone interview from Kuala Lumpur.

But those measures take time to achieve the desired effect, and right now countries are struggling to cope.

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation with some 270 million people, reported 1,449 deaths on Thursday, its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic.

Daily cases through about mid-June had been about 8,000, but then began to spike and peaked last week with more than 50,000 new infections each day. Because Indonesia's testing rate is low, the actual number of new cases is thought to be much higher.

As hospitals there began to run out of oxygen, the government stepped in and ordered manufacturers to shift most production from industrial purposes and dedicate 90% to medical oxygen, up from 25%.

Before the current crisis, the country needed 400 tons of oxygen for medical use per day; with the sharp rise in COVID-19 cases, daily use has increased fivefold to more than 2,000 tons, according to Deputy Health Minister Dante Saksono.

Though the production of oxygen is now sufficient, Lia Partakusuma, secretary general of Indonesia's Hospital Association, said there were problems with distribution so some hospitals are still facing shortages.

In Indonesia, about 14% of the population has had at least one vaccine dose, primarily China's Sinovac.

There are growing concerns that Sinovac is less effective against the delta variant, however, and both Indonesia and Thailand are planning booster shots of other vaccines for their Sinovac-immunized health workers.

In Myanmar, the pandemic had taken backseat to the military's power seizure in February, which set off a wave of protests and violent political conflict that devastated the public health system.

Only in recent weeks, as testing and reporting of COVID-19 cases has started recovering, has it become clear that a new wave of the virus beginning in mid-May is pushing cases and deaths rapidly higher.

Since the start of July its death rate has been climbing almost straight up, and both cases and fatalities are widely believed to be seriously underreported.

"With little testing capacity, low numbers in the country vaccinated, widespread shortages of oxygen and other medical supplies, and an already beleaguered health care system under increasing strain, the situation is expected to get increasingly worse in the coming weeks and months," said ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, a regional advocacy group.

"Meanwhile, the junta's confiscation of oxygen, attacks on health care workers and facilities since the coup, and the lack of trust in any services they provide by the majority of the population, risks turning a crisis into a disaster."

On Thursday, the government reported 6,701 new cases and 319 new deaths. There are no solid figures on vaccinations, but from the number of doses that have been available, it's thought that about 3% of the population could have received two shots.

Officials this week pushed back at social media postings that cemeteries in Yangon were overwhelmed and could not keep up with the number of dead, inadvertently confirming claims that hospitals were swamped and many people were dying at home.

Cho Tun Aung, head of the department that oversees the cemeteries told military-run Myawaddy TV news on Monday that 350 staff members had been working three shifts since July 8 to ensure proper cremations and burials of people at Yangon's seven major cemeteries.

He said workers had cremated and buried more than 1,200 people on Sunday alone, including 1,065 who had died at home of COVID-19 and 169 who had died in hospitals.

"We are working in three shifts day and night to inter the dead," he said. "It is clear that there is no problem like the posts on Facebook."



## What is a COVID-19 vaccine 'breakthrough' case?

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

What is a COVID-19 vaccine "breakthrough" case?

It's when a fully vaccinated person gets infected with the coronavirus. A small number of such cases are expected and health officials say they're not a cause for alarm.

COVID-19 vaccines work by teaching the body to recognize the virus. So if you're exposed to it after vaccination, your immune system should be ready to spring into action and fight it.

In studies, the two-dose COVID-19 vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna were around 95% effective at preventing illness, while the one-shot Johnson & Johnson shot was 72% effective, though direct comparisons are difficult. So while the vaccines are very good at protecting us from the virus, it's still possible to get infected with mild or no symptoms, or even to get sick.

If you do end up getting sick despite vaccination, experts say the shots are very good at reducing the severity of the illness — the main reason to get vaccinated.

Most people with breakthrough infections experience mild illness, said Dr. William Moss, a vaccine expert at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

In the U.S., people who weren't vaccinated make up nearly all hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19.

It's difficult to determine why any particular breakthrough case happens. How much of the virus you're exposed to could be a factor, Moss said. Our individual immune systems will also affect how well we respond to the shots. Some people, for example, have health conditions or take medications that could make their immune systems less responsive to the vaccines.

People might also have been exposed to the virus before the shots took full effect. Though less likely, they may have received a dose that was improperly stored or administered, Moss said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes variants could be factors in some breakthrough cases, though evidence so far indicates the vaccines used in the U.S. are protective against them.

Health officials are also watching for signs that breakthrough cases are rising, which could signal that protection from the vaccines is fading and boosters are needed.

## Haiti leader's slaying exposes role of ex-Colombian soldiers

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and ASTRID SUAREZ Associated Press

BUCARAMANGA, Colombia (AP) — As the coronavirus pandemic squeezed Colombia, the Romero family was in need of money to pay the mortgage. Mauricio Romero Medina's \$790 a month pension as a retired soldier wasn't going far.

Then came a call offering a solution.

When Romero answered the phone on June 2, another veteran, Duberney Capador, offered what he said was a legal, long-term job requiring only a passport. But Romero had to make a decision fast.

"Talk about it with your family and if you are interested, see you tomorrow in Bogota, because the flight is the day after tomorrow," Romero's wife, Giovanna, told The Associated Press, recalling the conversation.

A month later, Romero and Capador were dead and 18 Colombians were reportedly in custody, accused of taking part in the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse. It's a case that dramatizes Colombia's role as a recruiting ground for the global security industry — and its murkier, mercenary corners.

Colombia's Defense Ministry says about 10,600 soldiers retire each year, many highly trained warriors forged in a decades-long battle against leftist rebels and drug trafficking cartels. Many — including a number of those involved in Haiti — have been trained by the U.S. military.

Those soldiers make up a pool of recruits for companies seeking a wide range of services — as consultants or bodyguards, in teams guarding Middle Eastern oil pipelines or as part of military-like private security in places like the United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan. The UAE paid Colombian veterans to join in the battle against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

"Colombian former (soldiers) are very well trained and ... may be cheaper or more accessible than other sorts of trained, specialized manpower," said Silvana Amaya, a senior analyst focused on the Andean re-

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gion for the global security firm Control Risks. "It's a good opportunity for former (soldiers) in Colombia to have a job that they're obviously prepared to do. ... So for both sides, supply and demand, we believe that it works well."

Sean McFate, a former U.S. Army paratrooper and private military contractor who has written about mercenaries, said Colombians are generally on par with U.S. and British soldiers, and are "good value" because they have combat experience, obey chain of command, work in teams and are tough.

"It's an illicit industry that operates around command language," McFate said. "The three main mercenary pillars are Spanish, English and Russian. And in the Spanish one, the Colombians are the biggest."

The wife of Francisco Uribe, who was among those arrested in the Haiti assassination, told Colombia's W Radio that the company that contracted the veterans, Florida-based CTU Security, offered the men about \$2,700 a month.

That can go a long way when exchanged to Colombian pesos. It's also far below the rates of retired Green Berets or other American, British, Israeli or South African veterans.

"We are normally paid almost 50%, and sometimes up to 70% less, for being Latin American," said retired Col. John Marulanda, president of the Colombian Association of Officers of Military Forces in Retirement and an international security consultant.

He insisted their work is only "a business" and "has nothing to do with mercenarism."

Colombian President Iván Duque last week said that only a small group of the former soldiers arrested in Haiti knew it was a criminal operation. He said the others were duped and thought they were traveling for a legitimate mission to provide protection.

Relatives note the men didn't think they needed to hide. Several posted social media photos of themselves during a stop in the neighboring Dominican Republic en route to Haiti.

Jenny Guardado, an assistant professor of Latin American studies at Georgetown University, said Colombian soldiers tend to come from rural, low-income neighborhoods, where drug cartels and rebel groups also recruit, and they usually see their military service as a way to climb the social ladder.

But some struggle after they leave the military, especially those who haven't put in the 20 years of service needed for a full pension. And, she said, some have complained about not getting their full benefits.

Colombia's armed forces commander, Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro, told reporters this month that the army does not have the capacity to monitor all retired military personnel, only to guarantee social assistance, including the pension.

Key details of what happened on July 7 are unclear.

Authorities said the attackers raided the president's home before dawn yelling "DEA operation!" and wielding high-caliber weapons. A small group entered and the rest stayed outside.

A judge told the AP the attackers tied up a maid and houseboy and ransacked Moise's office and bedroom. The president's daughter hid in her brother's bedroom and survived.

When it was over, Moise lay sprawled on his bedroom floor. He had been shot in the forehead, chest, hip and stomach, and his left eye was gouged. His wife was wounded by gunfire.

None of the president's security detail was injured — raising questions about their role.

The attackers don't appear to have made any plan to escape. Some hid in a nearby business. Others invaded the Taiwanese Embassy. Some were found hiding in bushes by passersby and handed over to police.

At least three of the Colombians were killed, including Romero and Capador.

Romero retired from the army in December 2019 after receiving multiple decorations, specializing as a military paratrooper and combat medic and attending the Lancero School, which provides army special operations training and is similar to the U.S. Army Ranger School.

"When the soldiers retire, they are invited to join armies in other countries," Giovanna Romero told the AP. "Mauricio was no exception to the fact that if one of those opportunities arose, it could be taken, because he had the knowledge for the job."

She said her husband never told her where he was going, and she learned of his death from the news media. Now, the Colombian government has informed the family that his pension will be suspended for

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the duration of an administrative process.

The Moise assassination presents a challenge for the Colombian security forces, which already were dealing with complaints about a heavy handed response to protests this year and over past allegations that soldiers sometimes killed innocent civilians and counted them as rebels slain in combat in order to boost body counts.

Colombian Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez has said the country is ready to offer consular assistance to the detained suspects and repatriate the bodies of the deceased. A former defense minister, she defended the nation's armed forces.

"I know perfectly well that the Colombian military are never, under any circumstances, mercenaries who are going to go on duty to commit any crime anywhere," Ramírez said.

## AP-NORC poll: Parties split on some infrastructure proposals

By JOSH BOAK and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The overwhelming majority of Americans -- about 8 in 10 -- favor plans to increase funding for roads, bridges and ports and for pipes that supply drinking water. But that's about as far as Democrats and Republicans intersect on infrastructure, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

President Joe Biden has bet that his handshake with a group of Republican senators can help power a \$973 billion infrastructure deal through Congress, while Democrats would separately take up a \$3.5 trillion proposal that could include money for child tax credits, schools, health care and other priorities. The dual-track approach has produced plenty of drama and uncertainty in Washington as negotiations continue, and those divisions seem to extend to the public at large.

The poll finds a slim majority of Americans, 55%, approve of Biden's handling of infrastructure; 42% disapprove. About 8 in 10 Democrats, but just 2 in 10 Republicans, approve of Biden on infrastructure.

"I like what he's done so far," said Marcos Ommati, 54, who lives in Arlington, Virginia, and edits a military magazine. "The infrastructure plan that he put out there, I think we need that desperately. If you drive around any places in the U.S., you see that the bridges are not in top shape."

After the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package jumpstarted the economy — possibly creating the risk of inflation — the administration trusts that many voters will cast their ballots in next year's election on infrastructure and other spending initiatives aimed at helping the economy.

There is general support for strengthening the electric grid, which has been battered this year by a deep freeze in Texas and extreme weather in recent months across the rest of the country. Many of the other infrastructure ideas championed by Biden splinter along party lines, with Republicans largely expressing uncertainty or opposition about many proposals.

Overall, at least 6 in 10 Americans back funding for local public transit, for affordable housing and for broadband internet service. While strong majorities of Democrats are in favor, fewer than half of Republicans back any of the three.

About two-thirds of Democrats also support funding for passenger and rail service, compared with about 4 in 10 Republicans. Among Republicans, roughly a quarter say they are opposed and about a third say they hold neither opinion.

Fewer than half of Americans, 45%, back funding for electric vehicle charging stations, while 29% are opposed. About two-thirds of Democrats, but only about a quarter of Republicans, are in favor. Roughly half of Republicans are opposed.

Slim majorities back expanded child tax credits for families with children and free community college for those who have not yet been to college. About three-quarters of Democrats favor both proposals.

Only about a quarter of Republicans support free community college, while about 6 in 10 are opposed. Republican views are more mixed on the expanded child tax credit: 34% are in favor, while 42% are opposed; another 24% say they hold neither opinion.

Support is generally stronger for funding for free preschool programs, with about two-thirds in support,

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including about 8 in 10 Democrats and about half of Republicans. Three in 10 Republicans are opposed. But those investments in children and preschool strike voters like Alan Gioannetti as distortions of the idea of infrastructure. He equates the concept with anything that involves the work of engineers.

"If I need the foundation on my house repaired, I'm not going to call a social worker — I'll call an engineer," said Gioannetti, 69, who retired from the oil and gas business and lives in Seabrook, Texas. He takes a similarly dim view on Biden: "Being in the energy business, this new clown we have for a president screwed everything up for my friends and family."

To pay for infrastructure improvements, about two-thirds of Americans support raising taxes on corporations and raising taxes on households earning more than \$400,000 annually. But again, there is a divide on taxes as many Republicans lawmakers believe the increases would hurt economic growth.

At least 8 in 10 Democrats, but about 4 in 10 Republicans, support raising taxes on corporations or households earning over \$400,000 annually. Close to 4 in 10 Republicans oppose both.

The tax issue is as much about fairness as many Americans see the existing rules as enabling billionaires such as the founder of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, to pay at lower rates than people in the middle class.

"The tax system has allowed people to take advantage of their wealth, and I pay more taxes," said Amy Stauffer, of Hesston, Kansas, who voted for Biden. "I pay more taxes than Jeff Bezos. Something's wrong with that."

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## Tokyo new virus cases near 2,000 a day before Olympics open

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Tokyo hit another six-month high in new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, one day before the Olympics begin, as worries grow of a worsening of infections during the Games.

Thursday's 1,979 new cases are the highest since 2,044 were recorded on Jan. 15.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who is determined to hold the Olympics, placed Tokyo under a state of emergency on July 12, but daily cases have sharply increased since then.

The emergency measures, which largely involve a ban on alcohol sales and shorter hours for restaurants and bars, are to last until Aug. 22, after the Olympics end on Aug. 8.

Japan has reported about 853,000 cases and 15,100 deaths since the pandemic began, most of them this year. Still, the number of cases and deaths as a share of the population are much lower than in many other countries.

The Olympics, delayed for a year by the pandemic, begin Friday. Spectators are banned from all venues in the Tokyo area, with limited audiences allowed at a few outlying sites.

Suga's government has been criticized for what some say is prioritizing the Olympics over the nation's health. His public support ratings have fallen to around 30% in recent media surveys, and there has been little festivity ahead of the Games. On Thursday, the director of the opening ceremony, Kentaro Kobayashi, was dismissed over a past Holocaust joke.

In Olympics-related diplomacy, Suga is to meet with U.S. first lady Jill Biden on Thursday and have dinner at the state guest house. Earlier in the day, he was visited by World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Also Thursday, Emperor Naruhito received a courtesy visit from International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach at the Imperial Palace. Naruhito said he hoped all athletes will compete in good health and achieve their best performances. Bach said the Olympic community is doing its best not to pose any risk to the Japanese.

Experts say virus infections among unvaccinated people younger than age 50 are rising sharply.

Japan's vaccinations began late and slowly, but the pace picked up in May as the government pushed to accelerate the drive before the Olympics, though the pace has since slowed due to a shortage of imported vaccines.

About 23% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, way short of the level believed necessary to have any

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meaningful effect on reducing the risk in the general population.

Experts warned on Wednesday that infections in Tokyo are likely to continue to worsen in coming weeks.

## The Latest: 3rd Czech athlete tests positive in Tokyo

The Latest on the Tokyo Olympics, which are taking place under heavy restrictions after a year's delay because of the coronavirus pandemic:

A third athlete from the Czech Republic has tested positive for COVID-19 at the Tokyo Games.

The Czech team says beach volleyball player Markéta Sluková has entered a quarantine hotel, where two other athletes and two other coaches in its national delegation are staying.

Another Czech beach volleyball player, Ondřej Perušič, tested positive this week. Table tennis player Pavel Sirucek also tested positive.

The Czech Olympic team says it's investigating if the outbreak of COVID-19 is linked to its charter flight to Tokyo.

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A refugee team athlete who defected from Iran citing institutional sexism will face an Iranian opponent in the taekwondo competition at the Tokyo Olympics.

Kimia Alizadeh became the first Iranian woman to win an Olympic medal when she took bronze at age 18 at the Rio de Janeiro Games.

Alizadeh later criticized wearing the mandatory hijab headscarf and left Iran to live in Germany.

On Sunday, Alizadeh will face Iran's Nahid Kiyani Chandeh in the qualifying round of the women's 57-kilogram class.

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The Olympic judo draw has created fascinating paths to gold for the two biggest stars in the sport.

Japanese 73 kg superstar Shohei Ono and French two-time Olympic gold medal-winning heavyweight Teddy Riner both ended up in the same quarter of their draws as the No. 1 seeds in their weight classes. Both came into Tokyo unseeded because of recent inactivity, making them a potential disaster for every medal hopeful in their divisions.

Ono, the current pound-for-pound star of the sport, was placed in the same quarter of the men's field as Azerbaijan's top-seeded Rustam Orujov, one of his greatest rivals.

Ono didn't compete for the past 18 months, but only one judo player in the Olympic field has ever even scored a point against him.

Riner was drawn into the same quarter as the Russian team's Tamerlan Bashaev, who won silver at the world championships last month. The 6-foot-8 Riner is attempting to win his record-tying third gold medal and his fourth Olympic medal overall, but he recently revealed he tore knee ligaments in February.

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Gymnast Oksana Chusovitina says her record eighth Olympics will be her last.

The 46-year-old from Uzbekistan is competing on vault at the Tokyo Games, nearly 30 years after making her Olympic debut while competing for the Russian Federation in Barcelona in 1992.

Chusovitina has won a pair of Olympic medals during her long career. She was part of the Russian Federation team that captured gold in 1992. She later added a silver medal on vault while competing for Germany in 2008.

Chusovitina says she wants to spend more time with her 22-year-old son Alisher, who recently completed college.

She credits gymnastics for helping save Alisher's life as a child. Alisher was diagnosed with leukemia when he was 3. Chusovitina moved to Germany to give him access to treatment and used the living she made there as a gymnast to help pay for his care.

Chusovitina needs to finish in the top eight during qualifying on Sunday to advance to the finals scheduled for Aug. 1.

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German women's field hockey captain Nike Lorenz has been given approval to wear a rainbow armband and socks at the Olympics.

The German Olympic Committee says it got approval from the International Olympic Committee for Lorenz to wear the colors against Britain on Sunday.

The German Olympic Committee says it is "a symbol for sexual diversity."

Lorenz has previously worn a rainbow armband for games in other competitions.

The IOC has recently relaxed how it implements a rule which historically stopped athletes making political, religious or other statements of belief or identity.

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A second Dutch athlete and a staff member have tested positive for COVID-19 at the Tokyo Games.

Team NL says taekwondo athlete Reshmie Oogink and a rowing team staff member have tested positive and will quarantine for 10 days.

"I am speechless" Oogink said. "I have done everything I could and have worked so hard to get so close to the Games. I even overcome major knee injuries and now it has come to a sudden end. This is the end of my career."

Chef de Mission of TeamNL Pieter van den Hoogenband says the team is doing everything to keep infection to a minimum, but the situation is having an impact.

A day earlier, on Wednesday, Dutch skateboarder Candy Jacobs said on Instagram that she had tested positive and been sent into quarantine.

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U.S. gymnast Kara Eaker is doing well physically but remains in isolation three days after testing positive for COVID-19.

Annie Heffernon, the vice president of the women's program for USA Gymnastics, said Eaker is in isolation while teammate Leanne Wong is in quarantine.

Both athletes served as alternates for the U.S. team. Wong, who continues to test negative, was put in quarantine due to contact tracing.

Heffernon called the positive test a "nightmare scenario" and admitted she is dealing with anxiety while waiting for the team's daily COVID-19 test results.

"I mean, we're devastated for them," Heffernon said. "Of course, it's not anything we dreamed of happening or wanted to happen. And it was a rough 36 hours, I'm not going to lie. It was difficult for everybody. It was hard for me. It was hard for the athletes. It was hard for the staff."

The six-women U.S. delegation of Simone Biles, Sunisa Lee, Jordan Chiles, Grace McCallum, Jade Carey and MyKayla Skinner worked out on each event during podium training on Thursday.

The American women are staying in a hotel near the venue rather than the Olympic village, a decision made before they arrived for the Games.

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Australia has evened its record to 1-1 in Olympic softball with a 1-0 victory over Italy in Olympic softball. Jade Wall hit a run-scoring single in the second inning and Kaia Parnaby took a three-hitter into the seventh. Australia is fourth among the six teams after an opening loss to Japan, and Italy fell to 0-2.

Taylah Tsitsikronis doubled off Greta Cecchetti leading off the second, advanced on Tarni Stepto's ground-out and scored on a two-out infield hit by Wall, who beat the throw to first after second baseman Andrea Filler's diving, backhand stop.

Italy's Giulia Longhi singled with two outs in the seventh, pinch-runner Fabrizia Marrone stole second and Laura Vigna worked out a nine-pitch walk.

Ellen Roberts, who played college ball for Memphis, made her Olympic debut after Parnaby had thrown 85 pitches, and Marta Gasparotto took a called third strike.

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American beach volleyball player Taylor Crabb is out of the Olympics after four positive COVID-19 tests, and Tri Bourne will take his place as the partner of four-time Olympian Jake Gibb when the competition

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begins this weekend.

Crabb confirmed his withdrawal Thursday in a statement to The Associated Press, noting that he was vaccinated and tested negative before he left the United States but tested positive when he arrived in Japan.

"I'm symptom-free, thankfully, but deeply disappointed to not be able to join Jake on the sand and compete as a member of Team USA," Crabb said. "I want Jake to play in his fourth Olympic games and I want him to bring home a medal. Tri Bourne, an incredible athlete, person and close friend will be competing alongside Jake and filling my spot on Team USA."

The Olympic beach volleyball tournament begins Saturday at Tokyo's Shiokaze Park, with Gibb and Bourne scheduled to play their first match on Sunday night against Italy.

The International Olympic Committee says it will start including images of athletes taking a knee in its official highlights reels and social media channels.

Players from five women's soccer teams kneeled in support of racial justice Wednesday, the first day it was allowed at the Olympic Games after a ban lasting decades.

But those images were excluded from the official Tokyo Olympic highlights package provided by the IOC to media including The Associated Press that could not broadcast the games live.

Official Olympic social media channels also did not include pictures of the athlete activism.

"The IOC is covering the Games on its owned and operated platforms and such moments will be included as well," the Olympic body said Thursday in an apparent change of policy.

Host Japan beat Mexico 3-2 in softball to improve to 2-0 at the Tokyo Games.

Mana Atsumi's squeeze bunt single with one out in the eighth inning scored automatic runner Eri Yamada.

Haruka Agatsuma's grounder to second off Danielle O'Toole advanced Yamada to third, and Atsumi bunted on a 0-1 pitch. Yamada was running on the pitch and slid home ahead of Amanda Sanchez's throw.

Mexico, 0-2 at its first Olympics, tied the score 2-2 when Yamada dropped Anissa Urtez's fly to center in the seventh inning for what was ruled a single.

One of the social media sensations of the Rio Olympics won't be competing in Tokyo. Namibia's Dan Craven tested positive for COVID-19 in Spain, where the former professional cyclist lives with his family.

Even more devastating was the timing of it.

Craven told The Namibian newspaper that he had been trying to receive a COVID-19 vaccine through Spain's national health care system, "but the bureaucratic system to get registered has just been crazy."

"Two hours after I tested positive," Craven said, "I got a phone call saying I can come in for my vaccine."

The tall, lanky rider with the bushy red beard said on his Instagram page that he caught the virus on a training ride with three other people. He was supposed to have the single starting spot for Namibia, where he was born, but tested positive in a pre-event test and will be replaced in Saturday's race to Fuji International Speedway by Tristan de Lange.

Four more residents of the Olympic Village, including two athletes, have tested positive for COVID-19. A total of 91 people accredited for the Tokyo Games have tested positive since the beginning of July.

Skateboarder Candy Jacobs of the Netherlands and table tennis player Pavel Sirucek of the Czech Republic tested positive and had to leave the village to enter a quarantine hotel.

Two additional "games-concerned personnel" — a category that includes team coaches and officials — staying in the village overlooking Tokyo Bay tested positive.

The 91 cases do not include athletes who tested positive at home before their scheduled travel to Tokyo for events they will now miss.

The United States beat Canada 1-0 for a 2-0 start in Olympic softball.

Monica Abbott pitched a one-hitter and center fielder Haylie McCleney and second baseman Ali Aguilar

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combined to throw out the potential tying run at the plate in the sixth inning.

The Americans are getting just enough offense as they try to regain the gold medal they lost to Japan in 2008.

Abbott struck out nine, walked three and needed 102 pitches to throw the Americans' second consecutive one-hitter. Cat Osterman, at age 38 the Americans' senior player, struck out nine over six innings and Abbott struck out the side in the seventh to finish an opening 2-0 win over Italy on Wednesday.

Amanda Chidester hit an RBI single in the fifth off loser Jenna Caira that scored McCleney, who went 3 for 3 with a walk and has reached base seven times in the two games.

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The Tokyo Olympic organizing committee has fired the director of the opening ceremony because of a Holocaust joke he made during a comedy show in 1998.

Organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto says opening ceremony director Kentaro Kobayashi has been dismissed. Kobayashi was accused of using a joke about the Holocaust in his comedy act, including the phrase "Let's play Holocaust," in one of his shows.

His dismissal comes the day before Friday's opening ceremony of the pandemic-delayed Games.

Earlier this week, a composer whose music is expected to be used at the opening ceremony was forced to resign because of past bullying of his classmates, which he boasted about in magazine interviews.

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Home hope Naomi Osaka will face 52nd-ranked Zheng Saisai of China and Novak Djokovic will play 139th-ranked Hugo Dellien of Bolivia in the opening round of the Olympic tennis tournament in Tokyo.

Draws were held two days before play opens at Ariake Tennis Park.

Osaka is returning to competition after she withdrew from the French Open following the first round to take a mental health break.

Djokovic is attempting to become the first man to complete a Golden Slam by winning all four major tennis tournaments and an Olympic singles gold medal in the same year.

Defending Olympic champion Andy Murray received a tough opening round draw against 15th-ranked Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada.

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Russian swimmer Ilya Borodin, the European champion in the 400-meter individual medley, will miss the Tokyo Olympics after testing positive for the coronavirus.

The Russian Swimming Federation says Borodin tested positive at a training camp in the city of Vladivostok in the Russian Far East.

The positive test came shortly before he was expected to travel to Japan with other Russian swimmers.

Federation vice-president Viktor Avdienko tells the Tass state news agency that Borodin has been placed into isolation, the rest of the team has tested negative and no one was deemed a close contact in Borodin's case.

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Jill Biden has embarked on her first solo international trip as first lady, leading a U.S. delegation to the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

On her way she stopped in Alaska, where she praised efforts to vaccinate residents in the rugged, remote state but noted the work is not done.

She has a robust agenda for roughly 48 hours on the ground in Japan's capital.

She is set to arrive in Tokyo Thursday afternoon and have dinner with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his wife, Mariko Suga.

She will hold a virtual get-together with members of Team USA Friday before meeting Emperor Naruhito at the Imperial Palace. She attends the opening ceremony for the Games in the evening.

She also will host a U.S.-vs.-Mexico softball watch party at the U.S. Embassy for staff and their families, and cheer U.S. athletes competing in several events before leaving Tokyo.

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Australia's highest-ranking Olympic official and the current premier of the state of Queensland, where the 2032 Summer Games will be held, have put an early test to the old adage that sports and politics don't mix.

Hours after Brisbane was given the hosting rights for the Games 11 years down the track following an International Olympic Committee vote in Tokyo on Wednesday, Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates had a public disagreement with Queensland state Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk.

The issue at the late night news conference in Tokyo? Whether Palaszczuk and other members of the city's delegation should attend the Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony on Friday.

Palaszczuk indicated she'd be staying in her hotel room.

That didn't sit well with Coates, a powerful vice-president for the IOC and one of the driving forces behind Brisbane having received the hosting rights so soon without any real competition.

Coates told Palaszczuk that she and the others could not stay home and sit in their rooms.

## Olympic scandals march on long after torch goes out

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

TOKYO (AP) — From doping to demonstrations to dirty officials, the Olympics have never lacked their share of off-the-field scandals and controversies that keep the Games in the headlines long after the torch goes out. The five-year gap since the last Summer Olympics has been no different. A brief look at some of the most notable news to hit the Olympic world since it last convened for the Summer Games:

SEX ABUSE — Larry Nassar's sexual abuse of hundreds of gymnasts in the U.S. opened a window into an abusive culture that permeates throughout the sport and in all corners of the globe. Since Rio de Janeiro, the U.S. Center for SafeSport opened to investigate complaints about abuse in sports. It took the decision-making process of these cases out of the hands of organizations such as USA Gymnastics, which for years had been forced to pit members (gymnasts) against members (coaches) when abuse allegations arose. Other abuse allegations in taekwondo, water polo and figure skating were among those that came to light in the United States, and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee rewrote its own bylaws to, in part, prioritize the mental and physical well-being of its athletes instead of the chase for Olympic medals.

RUSSIA DOPING — In Rio, the IOC rejected a World Anti-Doping Agency recommendation to ban all Russian competitors from the Olympics as punishment for a wide-ranging scheme the country designed to help its athletes dope without getting caught. As a result, around 270 Russians were permitted to compete in 2016. Possibly emboldened by the IOC move, Russia continued to cover up its misdeeds. In 2019, WADA investigators determined that Russia had manipulated 23 gigabytes of data that could have been used to pursue cases related to the original cheating. WADA suggested a four-year ban with heavy restrictions on which Russians could compete, but the Court of Arbitration for Sport watered it down. The end result: Some 335 Russian athletes will compete in Tokyo, though not wearing team uniforms and not under the Russian flag. They officially will be competing as members of the "ROC," or Russian Olympic Committee. Only 10 of those athletes will be in track and field; that sport's governing body, whose former leaders enabled some of the cheating (see below), has since taken a much harder stance on the Russia case than most.

DOPING RULES — A spotlight shined on anti-doping rules that call on athletes to submit their whereabouts so they can be subjected to testing without notice. Reigning Olympic champions Christian Coleman and Brianna McNeal and world champion Salwa Eid Naser are among those missing the Olympics after being banned for violations of this rule. ... And only weeks before the start of the Olympics, the ban of American sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson for a positive marijuana test fueled a debate about whether that drug — not considered a performance enhancer and legal in some parts of the globe — should be forbidden anymore.

WEIGHTLIFTING — Three of weightlifting's longtime leaders were charged with a number of offenses for a decade's worth of doping coverups and other crimes. The misconduct included 146 unresolved doping cases from 2009 through 2019. The international federation's president, Tamás Aján, was ousted after a German documentary exposed the misdeeds. Weightlifting's status for 2024 is in jeopardy; the IOC is calling for reforms and wants to see the sport cleaned up.

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**DEMONSTRATIONS** — A summer of unrest and activism in the United States in 2020 forced the IOC and the USOPC to reckon with their policies on demonstrations at the Olympics. The USOPC, after months of meetings and negotiations, determined it would not sanction its athletes for violating Rule 50, which has long disallowed protests and demonstrations inside the lines. Though the IOC recently relaxed the rule to allow some forms of demonstration near the starting line, the ban on the medals podium remains, setting up what could be a conflict at the Olympics.

**SPORTS GOVERNANCE** — The IOC stripped the International Boxing Association's Olympic status in the wake of an investigation in which the U.S. Treasury accused the organization's president of involvement in drug production and heroin trafficking. ... Influential Kuwaiti IOC member Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah is awaiting trial on a forgery charge linked to an alleged coup attempt. ... The former president of track's governing body, Lamine Diack, and other top officials were found guilty of corruption for covering up cases in the Russian doping scandal in exchange for bribes. ... Swimming's international federation (FINA) has been under the microscope for a number of reasons, including electing a leader who was named an unindicted co-conspirator in a bribery case involving soccer's top body. FINA also was criticized for not coming down harshly enough on Chinese Olympic champion Sun Yang, whose own doping/testing case meandered through the sports legal system for several years; Yang will miss Tokyo but be eligible for the Paris Games in 2024.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined  
Today in History

Today is Friday, July 23, the 204th day of 2021. There are 161 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 23, 2003, Massachusetts' attorney general issued a report saying clergy members and others in the Boston Archdiocese probably had sexually abused more than 1,000 people over a period of six decades.

On this date:

In 1829, William Austin Burt received a patent for his "typographer," a forerunner of the typewriter.

In 1945, French Marshal Henri Petain (ahn-REE' pay-TAN'), who had headed the pro-Axis Vichy (vee-shee) government during World War II, went on trial, charged with treason. (He was convicted and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to life in prison. On this date in 1951, Petain died in prison.)

In 1958, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II named the first four women to peerage in the House of Lords.

In 1967, five days of deadly rioting erupted in Detroit as an early morning police raid on an unlicensed bar resulted in a confrontation with local residents that escalated into violence that spread into other parts of the city; 43 people, mostly Blacks, were killed.

In 1982, actor Vic Morrow and two child actors, 7-year-old Myca Dinh Le and 6-year-old Renee Shin-Yi Chen, were killed when a helicopter crashed on top of them during filming of a Vietnam War scene for "Twilight Zone: The Movie." (Director John Landis and four associates were later acquitted of manslaughter charges.)

In 1983, an Air Canada Boeing 767 ran out of fuel while flying from Montreal to Edmonton; the pilots were able to glide the jetliner to a safe emergency landing in Gimli, Manitoba. (The near-disaster occurred because the fuel had been erroneously measured in pounds instead of kilograms at a time when Canada was converting to the metric system.)

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush announced his choice of Judge David Souter of New Hampshire to succeed the retiring Justice William J. Brennan on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1997, the search for Andrew Cunanan (koo-NAN'-an), the suspected killer of designer Gianni Versace (JAH'-nee vur-SAH'-chee) and others, ended as police found his body on a houseboat in Miami Beach, an apparent suicide.

In 1999, space shuttle Columbia blasted off with the world's most powerful X-ray telescope and Eileen Collins, the first woman to command a U.S. space flight.

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In 2003, a new audiotape purported to be from toppled dictator Saddam Hussein called on Iraqis to resist the U.S. occupation.

In 2006, Tiger Woods became the first player since Tom Watson in 1982-83 to win consecutive British Open titles.

In 2017, a tractor trailer was found in a Walmart parking lot in San Antonio, Texas, crammed with dozens of immigrants; ten died and many more were treated at a hospital for dehydration and heat stroke. (The driver, James Bradley Jr., was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to transporting the immigrants resulting in death.)

Ten years ago: Singer Amy Winehouse, 27, was found dead in her London home from accidental alcohol poisoning. Retired Army Gen. John Shalikashvili, the first foreign-born chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, died at Madigan Army Medical Center near Tacoma, Washington, at age 75. Nguyen Cao Ky, 80, the flamboyant former air force general who'd ruled South Vietnam for two years during the Vietnam war, died in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A bullet train crash in southern China claimed 40 lives.

Five years ago: A suicide bomber detonated his explosives-packed clothing among a large crowd of demonstrators in the Afghan capital, killing at least 80 people; the Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

One year ago: In response to an ACLU lawsuit, a federal judge blocked federal agents in Portland, Oregon from arresting or using physical force against journalists and legal observers at the ongoing protests there. In a shift from his earlier demand for a full reopening of the nation's schools, President Donald Trump acknowledged that some schools might need to delay reopening in the fall as the coronavirus continued to surge. France reported a sharp uptick in coronavirus cases as people let down their guard heading into the country's summer break. The virus-delayed and shortened major league baseball season began with the World Series champion Washington Nationals hosting the New York Yankees at an empty Nationals Park; Dr. Anthony Fauci threw out the ceremonial first ball. (The Yankees won, 4-1, in a game halted by rain.)

Today's Birthdays: Retired Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy is 85. Actor Ronny Cox is 83. Actor Larry Manetti is 78. Rock singer David Essex is 74. Singer-songwriter-politician John Hall is 73. Actor Belinda Montgomery is 71. Rock musician Blair Thornton (Bachman Turner Overdrive) is 71. Actor-writer Lydia Cornell is 68. Actor Woody Harrelson is 60. Rock musician Martin Gore (Depeche Mode) is 60. Actor Eriq La Salle is 59. Rock musician Yuval Gabay is 58. Rock musician Slash is 56. Actor Juan Pope is 54. Model-actor Stephanie Seymour is 53. Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., is 52. Actor Charisma Carpenter is 51. R&B singer Sam Watters is 51. Country singer Alison Krauss is 50. R&B singer Dalvin DeGrate is 50. Rock musician Chad Gracey (Live) is 50. Actor-comedian Marlon Wayans is 49. Country singer Shannon Brown is 48. Actor Kathryn Hahn is 48. Retired MLB All-Star Nomar Garciaparra (NOH'-mar gar-SEE'-ah-parrah) is 48. Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky is 48. Actor Stephanie March is 47. Actor Shane McRae is 44. R&B singer Michelle Williams is 41. Actor Paul Wesley is 39. Actor Krysta Rodriguez is 37. Actor Daniel Radcliffe is 32. Country musician Neil Perry is 31. Actor Lili Simmons is 28. Country singer Danielle Bradbery (TV: "The Voice") is 25.