

Dear Jackson County Commissioners,

Jackson County reported 542 new infections and 163 people hospitalized due to COVID-19 on August 16. Our hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, the majority of which are unvaccinated and would not likely need hospital care if they were vaccinated. The number of unvaccinated Jackson County residents needing hospital care due to COVID-19 is increasing daily in spite of the lack of hospital capacity.

According to a recent Medford Mail Tribune article, patients are being denied critical medical care because COVID-19 patients are taking up the capacity of the hospitals. The Tribune reports that "Hospitals have canceled surgeries unless a person will die within days without care." And "Asante has had to deny more than 350 surgeries."

Also of great concern, "Physically and emotionally exhausted health care workers are putting in 12-, 16- and 20-hour shifts as they struggle to care for surging numbers of patients."

Jackson County's Health Officer, Dr. Jim Shames, said it clearly, "Vaccination can stop this. It can stop people from getting really sick, it can stop the number of cases we're seeing and it can reduce the number of people who are sick in our hospitals."

This crisis calls for leadership by our elected leaders at Jackson County. Anything less than strong, vocal support for residents to follow the advice of the County's health department to get vaccinated and comply with the mask mandate encourages the widespread suspicion of the vaccine that is preventing us from getting this pandemic under control.

The rapid spread of the Delta variant among unvaccinated people is costing us dearly – in the unnecessary, bone deep exhaustion of medical workers; the lack of care of people with other medical needs; the disruption of our economy, school system, and daily lives; and most importantly, the deaths of Jackson County residents.

We call on you today to step forward and advocate strongly for the public health measures – vaccinations and masks – that are necessary to bring this crisis to an end.

Ashland City Council