

## Tracking an Outbreak The Shutdown and Research

## WASHINGTON-CANADA CROSSING

## Closed Border Cripples Once-Bustling Blaine

By RACHEL ABRAMS

BLAINE, Wash. — Over the past couple of years, Mike Hill poured more than \$3.5 million into renovating his Chevron gas station here and opening a Starbucks next door. People from British Columbia came in droves to buy cheap gas and milk. It seemed like a slam dunk investment.

Len Saunders, an American immigration attorney, remembers talking to Mr. Hill about the plan when he was trying to convince Starbucks to open in town. “They said to him, what if the border closes down?” Mr. Saunders recalled. The idea seemed so preposterous to those who lived in Blaine that “everyone laughed.”

Then Covid-19 arrived. Now almost no one comes to Blaine anymore.

When the border between the United States and Canada closed to nonessential travel on March 21, the southbound traffic into Blaine — the busiest crossing between Washington and British Columbia — slowed to a trickle. In June, just 12,600 people entered the United States from British Columbia, down from 479,600 during the same month last year.

The economic impact on Blaine, a city of about 5,000, has been crippling. Beaches are now largely empty save for the rocks left by the receding tide. More than a dozen gas stations that once bustled with people heading elsewhere are quiet. The stores that handled mail order goods for Canadians looking to avoid taxes are piled high with packages that their purchasers cannot pick up.

“The longer this goes, the more devastating it gets,” Michael Ebert, the president of Blaine’s Chamber of Commerce, said as he pointed to the empty storefronts and recently shuttered shops.

The loss is particularly painful to Mr. Hill, 59, a lifelong resident who has seen the town go through cycles — he used to help kick the drunks out of his family’s bar, back when Canada banned alcohol on Sundays and a rowdier crowd frequented Blaine’s night spots.

Mr. Hill acknowledges that Blaine was always a way station for people heading to perhaps more interesting locales. And sure, there were some empty

storefronts on Main Street before the pandemic closed many of them down. But in the last few years, he saw more businesses coming into town.

In large part, the resurgence was fueled by Amazon. Canadians could save money on shipping and taxes by sending their orders to stores in the United States and picking them up later. Today, Blaine has dozens of businesses handling packages from online commerce. Other businesses followed — including the Starbucks next to Mr. Hill’s gas station, which opened in 2018, and a hemp clothing store called Rawganique. A grocery store was set to move in soon.

“We all felt like Blaine was finally gonna hit its time,” said Mark Seymour, who works with his father, Steve Seymour, at their oyster farm and restaurant. “And then this happened.”

“Gas and packages have been the backbone of our economy,” Mr. Ebert, the Chamber of Commerce president, said. “You come around the holidays, these package places, by the time they’re open, they’ve got about 20, 25 in line.”

At Mail Boxes International, employees say that it feels like Christmas — only without the joy. Yet-to-be-claimed boxes are piled waist-high in the lobby. The top shelves of the storeroom, normally bare, are stacked tall enough to reach the rafters.

When the border first closed, many Canadians figured it would reopen soon, and they kept ordering online goods, the owner, Brant Baron, said. He put a second storage container in the parking lot to handle the overflow. But then the border reopening got pushed back again, and then again, and Canadians stopped ordering as much. Looking at all the boxes, you wouldn’t know that business is down 75 percent.

“All this is kind of a war zone,” Mr. Baron said, gesturing to piles of “forwards” in the lobby — boxes that his staff needed to measure to calculate what it would cost to ship them to Canada. Most customers, Mr. Baron predicted, would find it prohibitively expensive, and he’d have to find a place for them in the storage room.

“We’ve gotten creative with the shelving,” he said.



Just months ago, cars may have crawled through several lanes of traffic for hours before crossing the border. Now, all of those lanes are empty. On a recent afternoon, a United States Customs and Border Protection vehicle sat in the highway leading into Canada, and several officers milled around.

“They tell me they’re bored,” said Mr. Saunders, who recognized a couple of the officers by name. Normally they would be stationed inside the port of entry inspecting applicants for admission, he said. Sometimes they patrolled Peace Arch Park, a strip of land straddling the border where

people from both countries can still meet. The park also serves as Mr. Saunders’s de facto office, since he tries to avoid meeting clients inside his office these days.

Early in the pandemic, he worried that his business would dry up. But many people, especially couples separated by the border closure, have been rushing to get their green cards processed. For a while, some even set up tents in the park, Mr. Saunders said, until

Mark Seymour, above right, hauling oysters for Drayton Harbor Oysters in Blaine, Wash., near the border with British Columbia. Left, Len Saunders, an immigration lawyer, meeting with clients Lynton Harris and Julie Arps in Peace Arch Park in Blaine.

those got shut down recently, too.

“Why do you think they’re in tents?” he said. “They haven’t seen each other in three months.”

On Tuesday, officials confirmed that the border would remain closed until at least Aug. 21, extending the reopening for a fifth time.

Canada has had about half as many deaths per capita as the United States. The number of cases in Canada has been steadily declining since April, while cases in some states are surging.

“I’m not very optimistic at all,” Steve Seymour, Mark Seymour’s father, said during a recent interview at the family business, Drayton Harbor Oysters. “Why would they let us in?”

Drayton is just a couple minutes down the street from Mr. Hill’s Chevron and Starbucks, and business is down, Mr. Seymour said. Still, he considers himself one of

the lucky ones.

The city gave him permission to use a little more outdoor space for extra tables, he said, and on a recent afternoon, customers were ordering grilled garlic butter oysters and fried shrimp tacos to eat at tables they were asked to bus themselves. Mr. Seymour farms his oysters nearby, and Drayton had been attracting Washingtonians who liked the farm-to-table approach.

Mr. Seymour is thinking about what’s next. He can still do take-out when the winter comes. And although he just spent money on new tables and chairs, he is considering buying tents and heaters for outdoor dining in the cold.

“My whole vision now is just to get through this year without being totally in huge debt,” Mr. Seymour said. Blaine had been on an upswing, after all. Business, he was sure, would be back. What were the chances it wouldn’t?

## HURDLE FOR SCHOOLS

## Study on Child Transmission Raises Concern

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI

In the heated debate over reopening schools, one burning question has been whether and how efficiently children can spread the virus to others.

A large new study from South Korea offers an answer: Children younger than 10 transmit to others much less often than adults do, but the risk is not zero. And those between the ages of 10 and 19 can spread the virus at least as well as adults do.

The findings suggest that as schools reopen, communities will see clusters of infection take root that include children of all ages, several experts cautioned.

“I fear that there has been this sense that kids just won’t get infected or don’t get infected in the same way as adults and that, therefore, they’re almost like a bubbled population,” said Michael Osterholm, an infectious diseases expert at the University of Minnesota.

“There will be transmission,” Dr. Osterholm said. “What we have to do is accept that now and include that in our plans.”

Several studies from Europe and Asia have suggested that young children are less likely to get infected and to spread the virus. But most of those studies were small and flawed, said Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

The new study “is very carefully done, it’s systematic and looks at a very large population,” Dr. Jha said. “It’s one of the best studies we’ve had to date on this issue.”

Other experts also praised the scale and rigor of the analysis. South Korean researchers identified 5,706 people who were the first to report Covid-19 symptoms in their households between Jan. 20 and March 27, when schools were closed, and then traced the 59,073 contacts of these “index cases.” They tested all of the household contacts of each patient, regardless of symptoms, but only tested symptomatic contacts outside the household.

The first person in a household to develop symptoms is not necessarily the first to have been infected, and the researchers acknowledged this limitation. Children are also less likely than adults to show symptoms, so the study may have underestimated

the number of children who set off the chain of transmission within their households.

Still, experts said the approach was reasonable. “It is also from a place with great contact tracing, done at the point interventions were being put in place,” said Bill Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Children under 10 were roughly half as likely as adults to spread the virus to others, consistent with other studies. That may be because children generally exhale less air — and therefore less virus-laden air — or because they exhale that air closer to the ground, making it less likely that adults would breathe it in.

Even so, the number of new infections seeded by children may rise when schools reopen, the study authors cautioned. “Young children may show higher attack

## Experts say schools will need to prepare for clusters of cases.

rates when the school closure ends, contributing to community transmission of Covid-19,” they wrote. Other studies have also suggested that the large number of contacts for schoolchildren, who interact with dozens of others for a good part of the day, may cancel out their smaller risk of infecting others.

The researchers traced the contacts only of children who felt ill, so it’s still unclear how efficiently asymptomatic children spread the virus, said Caitlin Rivers, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

“I think it was always going to be the case that symptomatic children are infectious,” she said. “The questions about the role of children are more around whether children who don’t have symptoms are infectious.”

Dr. Rivers was a member of a scientific panel that recommended reopening schools wherever possible for disabled children and for those in elementary schools, because those groups

have the most trouble learning online. She said the new study does not alter that recommendation.

The study is more worrisome for children in middle and high school. This group was even more likely to infect others than adults were, the study found. But some experts said that finding may be a fluke or may stem from the children’s behaviors.

These older children are frequently as big as adults, and yet may have some of the same unhygienic habits as young children do. They may also have been more likely than the younger children to socialize with their peers.

“We can speculate all day about this, but we just don’t know,” Dr. Osterholm said. “The bottom line message is: There’s going to be transmission.”

He and other experts said schools will need to prepare for infections to pop up. Apart from implementing physical distancing, hand hygiene and masks, schools should also decide when and how to test students and staff — including, for example, bus drivers — when and how long to require people to quarantine, and when to decide to close and reopen schools.

But they face a monumental challenge because the evidence on transmission within schools has been far from conclusive so far, experts said.

“People, depending on their ideology on school opening, are choosing which evidence to present — and that needs to be avoided,” said Jeffrey Shaman, an epidemiologist at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health in New York.

Although the new study does not offer definitive answers, it indicates that schools can increase virus levels within a community.

“So long as children are not just a complete dead end — incapable of passing the virus on, which does not seem to be the case — putting them together in schools, having them mix with teachers and other students will provide additional opportunities for the virus to move from person to person,” he said.

Dr. Shaman said, it’s important for children not to miss out on critical years in education, and school districts have the unenviable task of choosing between the options: “It’s hard trying to find the right balance.”



## ARTHUR J. SAMBERG

FEBRUARY 6, 1941 – JULY 14, 2020

The Jazz at Lincoln Center Board, Orchestra, and Staff mourn the loss of our dear friend Art Samberg. A member of Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Board of Directors since 2012, Art was a generous contributor to the organization’s programming, education, and advocacy initiatives. We are deeply indebted to Art for his civic-minded spirit, tireless support for music and mission, and holistic vision through a definitive time in our organization’s history.

A jazz lover as well as a leader in developing clean and sustainable power at TAE Technologies, Art was equally and expertly at home in both the art and technology worlds. Through the Samberg Family Foundation, Art’s family has generously contributed to art, science, and education projects throughout the country, furthering his mission to improve the world by supporting education, healthy living, and Jewish life.

“Art was a dedicated and extraordinary board member, and wise counsel to the organization,” said Jazz at Lincoln Center Board Chair Robert J. Appel. “He also loved our Orchestra and was an enthusiastic and active participant at many of our events. In 2019, we were proud to honor Art and Becky with the Jazz at Lincoln Center ‘Ed Bradley Award for Leadership’ in recognition of their contributions and unending support of our education programs. We honor Art’s memory by ensuring our work continues to positively impact thousands of lives around the world. Loved by many, Art is greatly missed.”

Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director, added, “Art is the only non-musician to sit in a concert with our trumpet section. He was a great section mate. And though we talked about it for over 10 years, we never played that game of basketball. He was such a lyrical and considerate man. What a great loss.”

Our thoughts are with Rebecca, Jeff, Joe, and the entire Samberg family.

Robert J. Appel, Chairman of the Board  
Clarence Otis, Chairman-Elect  
Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director  
Gordon Davis, Founding Chairman  
Lisa Schiff, Chairman Emeritus  
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