



Man dies from self-inflicted shot during altercation with police. **A3.**

NLS headed back to state. B1.

WILLMAR, MINN.

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Photos by Mike Moore / West Central Tribune

Dance team members from Lac Qui Parle Valley/Dawson-Boyd cheer on their jazz dancing teammates Saturday during the Section 3A Dance Team High Kick and Jazz Competition at Montevideo High School.

Majority of Minn. cases now among vaccinated

Health officials say vaccines still protect against severe illness and death from COVID

By Christopher Magan
St. Paul Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL — More than half of the Minnesotans who tested positive for COVID-19 in December were vaccinated, the latest evidence that waning vaccine protection and the highly-contagious omicron variant have altered the fight against the pandemic.

Roughly a third of those who were hospitalized for COVID-19 or died during that month also were vaccinated. The Minnesota Department of Health breakthrough case data does not indicate if people had received booster shots.

“We know omicron was a big part of it,” Daniel Huff, assistant commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Health, said of the growth in breakthrough infections. “We know omicron was immune-evasive, much more so than delta. Even those who were vaccinated, even though they had protection against infection, it was less protection than they had against delta infection.”

Nevertheless, health officials say vaccines, particularly the mRNA versions from Moderna and Pfizer, along with a booster dose remain the best way to protect against severe illness and to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

But health officials acknowledge that expectations about the protection vaccines provide continue to evolve. Vaccination was never a promise of total protection, but now, as the coronavirus has evolved through different variants, health officials acknowledge there’s an increased risk the vaccinated can still contract and spread COVID-19.

“The vaccines were initially designed and continue to do an excellent job at preventing severe disease — keeping people out of the hospital, keeping them out of the ICU and keeping them from dying,” said Dr. John O’Horo, a Mayo Clinic infectious diseases expert. “I think we have lost focus on what vaccines are designed to do, which is make this disease manageable.”

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SOMETHING TO CHEER ABOUT

Montevideo High School was the place to be Saturday afternoon, as the Section 3A Dance Team High Kick and

Jazz Competition brought out the masses for a loud, exciting afternoon of dancing action from teams around the region.

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More coverage of the competition, **PAGE B2**



Left: Montevideo High School parents and family members cheer on the Gold Dusters on Saturday during the Section 3A Dance Team High Kick and Jazz Competition at Montevideo High School.



Right: Yellow Medicine East fans cheer as the Silhouettes take to the stage Saturday during the Section 3A Dance Team High Kick and Jazz Competition at Montevideo High School.

Willmar considers airport expansion project

By Shelby Lindrud
West Central Tribune



West Central Tribune file photo

A plane lifts off in June 2016 at the Willmar Municipal Airport, flying over three other planes tied on the runway. A proposed project to extend the airport’s apron, along with a private hangar project, could open the airport to larger aircraft.

WILLMAR — As Willmar has grown, welcoming more businesses and people, the Willmar Municipal Airport has also seen an uptick in the traffic it sees coming in from the sky.

“We have had an increase in jet traffic,” said Eric Rudningen, airport manager. “We are seeing bigger, faster airplanes coming into Willmar.”

Unfortunately the airport doesn’t have a hangar with doors large enough to accommodate many of these planes, requiring them to be parked outside when at the airport, which can be problematic if the weather is bad. At Monday’s Willmar City Council meeting, Rudningen spoke to the council about a proposed

project at the airport that would see the construction of a larger hangar, along with expanding the main airport apron.

At first the plan was for the city to possibly borrow funds to build a larger hangar. Now a local business, which already uses and owns a hangar at the airport, is interested in building the hangar. It would be large enough for a bigger plane for the business while also having space to store other transient planes that are at the airport only for a short while.

“What that would do is allow for a 120-foot door opening and really be able to accommodate any aircraft that currently is able to use our 5,550-foot runway,” Rudningen said. While the hangar would be

built by a private party, the city would be responsible for expanding the main airport apron — the concrete pad where aircraft and vehicles are parked, maintained and fueled, among other aviation activities. A taxi lane connector will also be constructed as part of the plan.

The project, which is estimated to cost more than \$900,000 to construct, would be eligible for Federal Aviation Administration grant funds that would pay for nearly 84% of the project cost, with the state covering another 9.8%. The city would be responsible for about \$80,000 for the construction of the apron, Rudningen said.

“It is an opportunity for us,” Rudningen said.

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