

Governor's News Conference (June 11, 2021)

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, M.D., M.S.Ed., State Health Officer and State Epidemiologist:

Thank you, Governor Brown.

Let me begin today with a brief overview of the pandemic in Oregon, then address the recent modeling, which underscores the importance of vaccinations as an effective shield against COVID-19.

Daily cases, COVID-19 related hospitalizations and the percentage of people testing positive continue to decline.

The spread of the virus is receding in communities across the state.

- Over the past week, we've reported 1,725 new daily cases of COVID-19, a 26% drop. That's the lowest weekly total since last September, marking the sixth consecutive week of falling cases.

Thankfully we are also seeing a steady downturn in COVID-19 related hospitalizations, which has greatly lessened the pressure on our emergency rooms and local hospitals.

In the past week, new COVID-19 related hospitalizations dropped 24% over the previous week.

And in yet another encouraging trend: COVID-19 deaths — always a lagging indicator — are also declining.

- OHA reported 20 deaths in our most recent COVID-19 Weekly Report, a 60% drop from the previous week.

Every death from COVID-19 is tragic. My thoughts go out to everyone who has lost a loved one to the virus.

In summary, the landscape of the virus has shifted dramatically, creating what we described last week as two pandemics. As our

breakthrough data shows — the virus is overwhelmingly impacting those who are not fully vaccinated — while those vaccinated are safe from the virus.

Virtually every person now infected with the virus — or worse — who has required hospital care - has not been fully vaccinated.

The data, as well as our new modeling, clearly shows that the surging virus has more than met its match in the rising tide of Oregonians who are getting vaccinated every day.

The surge of infections and hospitalizations has receded as more people have gotten vaccinated. That is not a coincidence. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. They were exhaustively tested in clinical trials and that efficacy is reflected in the data here in Oregon.

Getting vaccinated is the best protection against contracting the virus, or from passing it along to someone else who may wind up in the hospital or die.

Time and again throughout this pandemic Oregonians have stepped up and turned back the resurgent virus. Initially this was by keeping physical distance, limiting our gatherings, wearing masks and washing our hands — and in the past six months, by getting vaccinated. Thank you.

More than 2.3 million Oregonians have received at least one dose of the safe and highly effective COVID-19 vaccine. Nearly 2 million have completed a vaccine series.

Thank you for taking that critically important step to protect your families, your loved ones and your communities. But, in order to decisively defeat the virus and prevent future outbreaks, more people must take that important step.

Let me speak to the issue of vaccine-induced immunity versus natural immunity. If you had COVID-19 and recovered, you may not have the same level of immunity as someone who has not been infected and has been fully vaccinated. It is unknown how long protection will last.

Individuals who have recovered from the disease have a robust response to the vaccine. It is recommended that they get the vaccine to increase their protection.

In all cases, it is better to have immunity from COVID-19 without being sickened by it. The disease can be deadly and even moderate infections can result in long-term and serious complications that can cause damage to the heart, kidneys, brain and lungs.

Here's the bottom line: There is no substitute for the protection afforded to us by the COVID-19 vaccines.

Finally, let me turn to the latest modeling.

The modeling shows that estimated immunity from vaccination is present in four times more people than those who have naturally acquired immunity.

The model clearly shows that transmission of the virus has slowed considerably. The statewide reproductive rate was estimated at .66 as of May 26.

At that rate of transmission, for the remainder of this month we would see a significant decline in daily cases to about 100 – and more importantly – five daily hospitalizations.

If we were to realize the more pessimistic scenario, with transmission rising by 20% we would still see a decline in daily cases — albeit a more gradual one — to 135 with seven hospitalizations.

We can protect ourselves, our families and our communities and return to normalcy more quickly by getting vaccinated.

We are finally gaining the upper hand against the virus. We have come too far — and sacrificed too much — to squander that progress. Thank you to everyone who has stepped up to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

The science and data cannot be clearer.

If you're protected against COVID-19, you are at low risk of getting the virus and your pandemic is nearing an end. If you have not been vaccinated your pandemic still rages and the virus presents a clear danger.

Please make a plan — and get vaccinated.

And with that I will turn things back over to Governor Brown.