

Governor's News Conference (June 25, 2021)

Patrick Allen, Director, Oregon Health Authority

Thank you, Governor Brown. I'm Patrick Allen, director of the Oregon Health Authority. I'm here with Dr. Dean Sidelinger, our state health officer, who will be available to answer questions.

This morning, I want to:

- **Tell Oregonians that we are on the doorstep of a 70 percent adult vaccination rate.**
- **I also want to remind everyone that COVID-19 still poses a serious risk for people who are unvaccinated and for under-vaccinated communities.**
 - 98 percent of people who are dying from COVID-19 are unvaccinated. And more contagious and possibly more dangerous variants are spreading in Oregon, posing a threat in counties with low vaccination rates.
 - Today, I'll talk about how we plan to work with county commissioners and public health officials to stem outbreaks and keep Oregonians safer after re-opening.
- **Finally, I want Oregonians to know we're not finished vaccinating vulnerable people.**
 - Oregon remains committed to vaccinating as many eligible people as we can, with a long-term aim to reach 8 in 10 adults, particularly in communities of color, who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. We are going to work to vaccinate enough Oregonians to end the pandemic and keep the virus from surging back.

Now, let's look at where we stand today. Based on the latest CDC figures:

- Oregon has vaccinated 69 percent of adults.
- Oregon still ranks 18th in the nation in total population who've received at least one dose.
 - According to the CDC, 58 percent of all Oregonians have had at least one vaccination.
 - The national average is 54 percent.

Today 2,365,492 Oregonians have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. It's no secret that vaccine demand has tapered in recent weeks, but we continue to reach Oregonians every day with a vaccine.

And when we look inside the numbers, we see some surprising and encouraging bright spots over the last full week of reporting (June 13-June 20):

- **At the county level, we're seeing an uptick in some rural counties.**
 - Over the past week, the seven-day vaccination rate of growth across the state has hovered around 1 percent.
 - Today, there are 8 counties who've vaccinated 65 percent or more of residents age 16 and older: Benton, Clackamas, Deschutes, Hood River, Lane, Lincoln, Multnomah and Washington counties.
 - However, the rate of growth in those counties has slowed. All these counties grew at less than 1 percent.
 - In contrast, 14 counties have vaccinated fewer than 50 percent of their residents who are 16 or older.
 - However, Crook, Gilliam and Umatilla all grew between 1.4 percent and 1.8 percent last week.
 - And in counties that have vaccinated more than 50 percent of their residents who are 16 or older, Clatsop, Jefferson, Marion, Sherman and Wasco all saw growth rates of 1.3 to 1.8 percent last week.
 - While many of these counties still have low overall vaccination rates, these growth spurts are an encouraging sign that we can reach more people.
 - These signs of growth may also tell us incentives are helping in some areas.
- **Growth in vaccination rates among younger people exceeds the rate of increase among older people.**
 - Growth among Oregonians who are between 12-15, 16-19 and 20-29 years old all increased between 1.5 percent and 4.5 percent last week, which outpaced the statewide average and the growth rate among older adults.

- In contrast, no age group among people 50 and older grew more than half (.5) a percentage point last week. However, Oregon is at 73 percent or above for people 60 and older.
- **When we look at race and ethnicity, our overall statewide growth in vaccinations is being carried by people in communities of color.**
 - Over the past week, vaccination growth among people of color continued to outperform whites.
 - Vaccination rates among Blacks, American Indians/Alaskan Natives and the Hispanic/Latinx community all grew by 1.4 to 1.6. percent, exceeding the statewide growth rate and at least doubling the rate of growth among whites, who grew at just .7 percent.

We couldn't have made this progress without the central role community-based non-profits have played in organizing events and reaching out to the communities they serve. OHA has received requests to help support vaccination clinics from more than 90 non-profits in Oregon. Here are some examples of the events they've organized:

- **The Oregon Marshallese Community Association (OMCA)** and the Woodburn Ambulance service held a vaccination clinic at an annual OMCA softball game, held to celebrate Marshallese Constitution Day at the South Salem Friends Church.
- **The Latino Community Association** has held several vaccination events in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties, including an event two weeks ago in Harwood Park in Prineville, co-hosted by Crook County, the Crook County Health Department and the Oregon Child Development Coalition. The event featured a live DJ, food and a healthy serving of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
- **Seed of Faith Ministries** recently partnered with the Urban League of Portland and Salem For Refugees to host a vaccination clinic in Salem. At this event, Rite Aid and JD Health and Wellness provided vaccinators, as well as all 3 authorized vaccines. The houseless community received rides to the event, and the organizers provided

a barbeque, music, and health resources. Other events have offered free haircuts too.

- **UTOPIA PDX, in partnership with the Q Center**, has been hosting vaccination events to celebrate Pride month. To celebrate Juneteenth, they held a clinic focused on Black Lesbian, Gay, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary youth and their parents.

Oregon’s rising vaccination rate is driving COVID-19 out of many homes, workplaces, nursing homes, schools and daycare centers and hospitals.

But as Oregon reaches the verge of re-opening, we can’t forget: **the pandemic isn’t over among people who aren’t vaccinated.**

- The vaccines have proven themselves. They are safe and effective.
- The latest Oregon data shows that more than nine in 10 COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations occur among people who aren’t vaccinated at all or aren’t fully vaccinated.
- Nearly every person who died of COVID-19 in the past month (98 percent) was unvaccinated.
- Yet, today seven counties need to vaccinate more than ten thousand people just to achieve a 65 percent vaccination rate among people 16 and older.

Low vaccination rates in local communities are dry tinder for new COVID-19 outbreaks to emerge and new variants to evolve.

So how will Oregon manage these risks after June 30, once the current statewide protections expire?

As Governor Brown said, we will lift statewide mask mandates, capacity limitations and social distancing requirements next week. Before vaccines arrived and during the early days of the vaccine roll-out, these protections were the only tools we had to slow the spread of the disease. And they worked – if Oregon had suffered the same death rate as the nation, 4,000 or more Oregonians than we’ve already lost would’ve lost their lives to COVID-19.

Now, with an adult vaccination rate of nearly 70 percent, we can pull back the statewide protections the virus forced on us and shift responsibility for managing COVID-19 to the local level.

Going forward, it will be up to county commissioners (who act as local health boards) and local public health officials to intervene to slow the spread of COVID-19. They will be responsible for conducting:

- Case investigations
- Contact tracing
- Ongoing vaccination efforts at the local level and
- Implementing other needed interventions, such as social distancing protections or additional mask requirements.

At OHA, our role will be to:

- Collect and report data
- Provide epidemiological analysis and support to local health officials
- Provide back-up case investigation and contact tracing support
- Continue to ensure adequate COVID-19 testing is available to Oregonians
- Monitor the emergence of variants and
- Continue to allocate vaccine supplies and support vaccination efforts, especially as we work to meet our goal to vaccinate eight in 10 people in communities of color by the end of August.

This change is in line with the way our public health system operates in normal times – outside a global, national and statewide health emergency.

When there's an outbreak of meningitis, measles or other communicable diseases, local health authorities take the lead. OHA's role is to provide support and fill the gaps: such as state public health lab testing, cross-county coordination and other roles.

Some local officials have been vocal in asking for this authority earlier in the pandemic, but that didn't make sense when we had higher rates of COVID-19 infection and hospitalizations – and lower rates of vaccination.

For the past 16 months, we've needed an "all together" pandemic response to confront a new and deadly threat. But now, with infections down statewide and vaccinations up, we can shift from a statewide posture to a footing that looks different in each community, depending on their local risks.

Don't get me wrong: this is not a "go it alone" moment, even if some people may want to their local leaders to pretend the pandemic is over.

Many unvaccinated people in Oregon remain highly vulnerable to COVID-19, especially as new variants that are more contagious and cause more severe disease are spreading in Oregon.

COVID-19 hasn't gone away. We still need an "all together" attitude.

In keeping with that spirit and with the way the public health system is designed to function, OHA will continue to help local health officials take appropriate action to save lives. But local officials will be responsible for making those decisions – and responding to the consequences in their communities.

Which brings me to my most important message: We're not finished vaccinating Oregonians.

A 70 percent vaccination rate among adults is a major accomplishment. As Dr. Sidelinger has shown, our rising vaccination rates correspond to a decline in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths. It's made a safer state reopening possible.

I want to say thank you to every Oregonian who's been vaccinated and everyone who's worked hard to vaccinate Oregonians.

But we can't stop there. Too many people remain at risk.

- We've made a commitment to leaders representing communities of color: We will vaccinate 80 percent of adults from tribes and from Black, Latino/Latina, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Asian communities. We're working hard to honor that pledge.
- We're also committed to forging on past 70 percent for all adults and work toward reaching as much as 80 percent of all adults before we're through. We want to vaccinate enough Oregonians of all eligible ages to achieve the

critical mass of immunizations that's necessary to truly bring this pandemic to a close.

- To achieve these goals, we're expanding vaccination events sponsored by non-profits, standing up a ground game that will send canvassers into under-vaccinated communities and expanding our public education messaging, tailored to address the questions we hear from different communities.

Once Oregon reopens, I want to let you know OHA will adjust our COVID-19 data reporting. After June 30, we will:

- **Maintain our weekday reporting** of cases, vaccinations, hospitalizations and other data, through our daily news release, social media updates, our popular "Coronavirus Update" newsletter and online dashboards.
- **However, we'll discontinue our weekend and holiday reporting**, which includes our:
 - Weekend news release
 - Weekend newsletter
 - Weekend social media posts in English and Spanish
 - Weekend Tableau dashboard updates and
 - Weekend hospital capacity reporting
- We will do catch-up reporting on Monday or the day following a holiday.
- During weekends, we will continue to have public health officials ready to address urgent issues and have a public information officer on call to monitor emergency media requests.

Finally, I want to encourage everyone to stay safe this weekend in the extreme heat.

According to the National Weather Service, many parts of Oregon are expected to reach record-breaking temperatures over the weekend, as high as 104 in central and eastern Oregon, 107 in the Portland area, and up to 112 in southcentral and southwest Oregon.

The OHA and CDC websites have good tips on how to stay cool, stay hydrated and stay informed about the symptoms of heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke – and ways to avoid and treat these serious conditions.

- OHA is also working with local public health officials to connect people to cooling centers – and we’re making emergency revisions to our guidance to review capacity limits during this historic heat emergency.
- And while many vaccination clinics will cancel events this weekend, we’re working to see if we can offer vaccinations at some cooling center locations.
- If you need access to a cooling center in your community, call 211.

Please be careful and stay cool this weekend.

With that, I’ll turn it back over to Governor Brown.