

## Press Conference (April 23, 2021)

### Patrick Allen, Director, Oregon Health Authority:

Thank you, Governor Brown. I'm Patrick Allen, Director of the Oregon Health Authority. This morning, I want to provide an update on vaccinations in Oregon and look ahead to show how Oregon can vaccinate a high percentage of adult residents by the start of summer, if we sustain our current rate of immunizations.

In addition to our vaccine update, I'm also joined by Dr. Sidelinger, who'll tell you about the red alert we see in the latest COVID-19 forecast. The COVID-19 virus is surging, and it is threatening to send more people — and younger people — to the hospital than we've seen before in this pandemic.

I want to underscore Governor Brown's call to action: We are entering a period of high risk as we try to beat back the latest wave of COVID-19 infections. But we can safely reopen before summer if enough of us get vaccinated to protect ourselves and each other.

But it's not enough to hit a target percentage of people who are vaccinated. We can't leave any community behind. We've continued to work with partners who serve the Latino/Latina/Latinx community and we're seeing evidence that the tools we're using are boosting the numbers.

- We'll continue to expand vaccinations through Federally Qualified Health Centers, events for migrant and seasonal farmworkers and food processors, mobile van outreach and local events sponsored by community partners.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the sad announcement we made yesterday: In partnership with CDC, we are investigating the tragic death of an Oregon resident who died after receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. At this time, we do not know if there is a causal link between her vaccination and her death. Her case is part of the federal safety review of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in connection with extremely rare blood clots. I want to express my deepest sympathies to her family.

At the same time, I want to assure all Oregonians that the federal Johnson & Johnson safety review shows that our monitoring systems are working to promptly identify and investigate adverse events that may follow a vaccination, determine if

there are health risks and provide health care providers and the public guidance based on the medical evidence. How Oregon deploys the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will depend on what we hear from the national medical experts deliberating at today's federal review.

Now, let's start with the current numbers.

- **According to the CDC, half of Oregon's adult population has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine:**
  - As of yesterday, the total in Oregon's ALERT IIS was 1,657,272. The CDC's data is slightly higher because it includes vaccinations administered by the Veterans Administration and other federal agencies.
  - That total represents 50% of Oregonians who are 18 or older.
  - When you look at these numbers compared to the total Oregon population, 40% of all Oregonians have received at least one shot.
- **More than 1 million Oregonians are fully vaccinated:**
  - Oregon has completed full two-dose vaccinations — or single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccines — for 1,000,830 people.
  - Overall, more than one in four Oregonians (26%) are now fully vaccinated.
- **Over the past week, our daily average of shots in arms remains above 30,000 doses administered per day:**
  - As of yesterday, Oregon is averaging 34,328 doses administered each day.
  - Our rolling average is down from last week, due to the pause in Johnson & Johnson vaccinations.
- **As of today, three in four seniors have been vaccinated.**
  - 573,803 people who are 65 and older have received at least one shot.
  - Oregon ranks 30th in the nation in the percentage of seniors who've begun their vaccination series and 30th in the nation in the percentage of seniors who've been fully vaccinated.

Now let's look at the number of doses we expect to get from the federal government in coming weeks.

As this slide shows, we're still on track to have enough doses to provide first-shot protection to the entire adult population of Oregon by July 4. While Johnson & Johnson supply disruptions and safety reviews have slowed our pace, these disruptions won't stop us from being in a position to reach a significant majority of Oregonians this summer — as long as Oregonians continue to demand vaccines at the current rates.

- Next week, we expect to receive approximately 150,000 prime doses of vaccine with expected doses from the federal pharmacy program.
- Until we learn more about Johnson & Johnson, we're not projecting any additional doses in our forecast.
- We are expecting to see some increases in the federal pharmacy program and in federal allocations to FQHCs.

Now, let's look at how those allocations can translate into vaccinations. This slide shows our current trajectory of COVID-19 first dose immunizations for Oregonians 18 and above. These numbers are also based on CDC data.

Right now, we're just at 50% of adult Oregonians who've received at least one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or a single shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Over the past week, we've seen our statewide vaccination rate increase by approximately 6 percentage points.

***If we continue at this pace:***

- Three in four Oregonians could receive at least their first vaccination by the beginning of summer.
- By July 4, eight out of 10 Oregonians could receive at least first-dose protection.

But sustaining that pace depends on Oregonians continuing to choose to get vaccinated, for all the many reasons that have moved more than **1.5 million Oregonians who've already made that choice.**

We know demand is greater in some counties than others. In others, vaccination rates have lagged.

The top five counties that have vaccinated the highest percentage of adults are: Hood River, Lincoln, Benton, Deschutes and Multnomah Counties.

- Each of these counties has vaccinated more than half their eligible populations.
- Hood River County leads the state. Health care providers have vaccinated nearly six in 10 people who are 16 or older.

The counties that have seen the lowest uptake among adults are: Lake, Umatilla, Malheur, Gilliam and Douglas Counties.

- Each of these counties has vaccinated fewer than 35% of their eligible populations.

OHA is working with counties to lower barriers to vaccinations, redeploy doses to meet demand and ensure that counties are closing the under-vaccination gap, especially for Latino/Latina/Latinx residents in their communities.

We're working with providers to:

- Ensure they administer doses within seven days, recognizing that some community events may take longer to plan.
- Eliminate any requirements that people show social security numbers at vaccination sites and deliver clear and consistent messages that you do not need insurance to get vaccinated.
- Allow walk-up vaccinations where possible.

We're also continuing our intensive and targeted direct and digital outreach in communities, where we've seen lower uptake rates, engaging people through the voices of neighbors, local doctors and other health care providers.

I want to come back to this slide that shows our current vaccination trajectory and illustrates the promise and the peril we face at this moment.

Governor Brown talked about the hill we need to climb. This is it.

Today, this relentless, shape-shifting virus is trying to fight its way back and regain control over our lives.

So many people are understandably tired. So many people understandably want to return to the familiar joys and routines of pre-pandemic life: a worry-free visit with

an elderly parent, the energy of crowded concert, the welcoming face of a friend that's not hidden behind a mask.

But we can't give up. We can stave off this virus. And we can keep it from coming back.

The best way to put the pandemic behind us is to take this simple, direct action: Get vaccinated.

We can reach a critical mass of immunized Oregonians, enjoy a safer summer and get back to the people we love and the things we love to do — if all of us do our part.

Get the facts. Make a plan. And get vaccinated. Go to [covidvaccine.oregon.gov](https://covidvaccine.oregon.gov) for more information.

Now let me turn it over to Dr. Sidelinger.

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

Thank you, Director Allen.

Spread of COVID-19 is accelerating throughout the state. Daily cases, percent positivity and hospitalizations continue along an alarming ascent — a fourth wave is upon us.

Our newest modeling indicates that the rate of transmission surpassed the most pessimistic scenario of three weeks ago. And if that spread continues unabated, our hospitals risk being swamped by virus-stricken patients.

Last week, I reported that daily cases of COVID-19 had more than doubled since early March to a seven-day moving daily average of 595 cases. As of yesterday, the 7-day average was 709 — a 20% increase.

Our latest COVID-19 report for the week ending April 18 reported 4,742 new cases — marking the fourth consecutive week of 20-plus percentage gains. This is driven by more transmissible variants and our actions.

As of today, OHA has reported 179,120 COVID-19 cases in Oregon and 2,476 COVID-19 related deaths. This is heartbreaking. My thoughts go out to everyone who has suffered a loss to the virus.

The percentage of positive COVID-19 tests is on a similarly troubling trajectory, climbing from a seven-day moving average of 3.9% in early March to an average of 5.7% as of yesterday.

The deluge in new cases is fueling a sharp rise in COVID-19 hospitalizations. As of this morning, there were 276 virus-stricken patients in Oregon's hospitals. That's a 39% increase over the past week and a 109% increase since March 1.

Additionally, we are seeing severe illnesses on the rise. On April 1, there were 39 COVID-19 patients in intensive care units. Today, there are 64.

We are approaching statewide hospitalization levels that could send counties back into higher risk levels. We cannot let the virus gain an upper hand.

We all possess the tools to slow the virus by continuing to wear masks, gather more safely and maintaining physical distancing. And, of course, by getting vaccinated as soon as possible.

Before I get to the modeling, let me briefly address yesterday's announcement concerning the death of an Oregon woman following immunization with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. This is a sad and tragic occurrence. I want to offer my condolences to her family, friends and all who knew or loved her.

She developed a rare but serious blood clot within two weeks following vaccination — the same condition that prompted the call for a pause in administering the vaccine. Her death is being reviewed by the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration teams that are assessing the potential risks and benefits of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

We recommend that people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine watch for symptoms, including severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain or shortness of breath for 21 days following vaccination and notify their doctor if they should develop.

Our nationwide system for safely monitoring vaccines is robust. Adverse events — even those that are very rare — are flagged by the national Vaccine Adverse

Events Reporting System (VAERS). The frequency of these reports at the time of the pause was extremely low — about 1 in a million.

And finally, let me turn to the modeling. Our most recent report indicates that, as of April 7, the statewide reproduction rate was estimated at 1.24. This means every person carrying the virus is spreading it to more than one other person.

The resulting forecast shows that, at the same transmission rate, new daily hospitalizations would increase by 38 by May 11.

If the transmission rate rises by 20% — on par with what we've been experienced in recent weeks — daily hospitalizations would climb to 68 per day, potentially overwhelming available beds for those who are most sick.

That projected level of increased hospitalizations threatens to severely tax our hospitals and risk a return to surge-necessitated practices, such as deferring elective procedures.

That is a risk we cannot afford to take.

The framework Governor Brown outlined earlier is within reach, but we will have to make changes to get there. Some difficult days await us. How difficult — and how long it lasts — depends on our actions over the next few weeks.

More of our friends, family, colleagues and neighbors are getting vaccinated every day. The temptation to relax our vigilance — especially after getting vaccinated — is real.

But here's the balancing act: The virus is relentless. It continues to sicken our friends and neighbors. It threatens to swamp our hospitals and reverse the hard-won progress we've achieved amid previous surges by wearing masks, keeping our distance and limiting higher risk indoor gatherings — and now, in the case of more than 1 million Oregonians — getting vaccinated.

Several times during this pandemic, Oregonians have stepped up to turn back a resurgent tide. We *must* prevail again.

Until we see enough Oregonians vaccinated to stop the spread, we must continue with other preventive measures.

Vaccinations are finally open to all of us. Thanks to everyone who has received a vaccination. I urge everyone to make a plan to get vaccinated.

And now I'll turn things over to Governor Brown.

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