

Strategies for Minimizing Vaccine Waste

April 29, 2021

Overview

Vaccine providers began administering vaccines in Oregon in December 2020. Since then, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has directed providers to avoid wasting doses given the high vaccine demand and limited supply. However, Oregon's vaccine supply is increasing and, particularly in some regions of the state, demand is decreasing. It can now be challenging to fill vaccine appointments.

This decrease in demand has created the need for OHA to update its guidance on vaccine waste. Some counties have questioned whether they should wait to open a vaccine vial until they are sure they can use all of the doses, or if they should move forward with vaccinating individuals as they express interest or schedule appointments, knowing that some doses will be wasted. Waiting until vials can be fully used runs the risk of making individuals wait a long time to get vaccinated, complicates appointment scheduling logistics, and increases the likelihood that some individuals on the wait list may change their mind about getting vaccinated.

This challenge is expected to continue as vaccine demand decreases across the state. Moderna's decision to include more doses per vial will further exacerbate this issue.

Updated OHA Guidance

A person operating a COVID-19 vaccination administration site is required to take all measures necessary to ensure that there are no leftover doses in a vial. A person operating a COVID-19 vaccination administration site:

- Should ensure that vaccine appointments are booked appropriately so that there are not leftover doses, considering no-show rates and other operational considerations.
- Establish a waiting list with contact information, and ideally who can arrive at the site with little advance notice.
- May offer leftover doses in a vial to any age eligible unvaccinated person.

While meeting these practices, priority should be given to getting someone vaccinated now. If that means that despite planning you are unable to use all the doses in the vial, please prioritize vaccinating anyone who is eligible and willing.

Recommended Strategies to Minimize Waste

1. Plan ahead using knowledge and experience of vaccine clinics to date. Depending on experience, consider overbooking appointments based on typical no-show numbers.
2. Keep a call down list for eligible individuals who are willing to come in on very short notice for the vaccine.
3. Marry up a list of public health employees who want to be vaccinated and do inpatients out of the same vial. Keep a call down list of employees and bring them in as a vial is opened for inpatient purposes.
4. Establish a regional center to distribute vaccines on a regular (daily/weekly) basis.

5. Offer vaccinations within the proximity of a vaccine event to avoid wasting any vaccine. Consider partnering with local businesses with high foot traffic, such as grocery stores or hotels, to use as a “dump site” to administer leftover doses.
6. Schedule mobile visits on the same day as a large vaccine event. Use leftover vaccine doses from the mobile unit at the large vaccine event.
7. Continue identifying target populations to build vaccine confidence using tailored communications and outreach. Get creative and use approaches that address the specific population’s barriers. Consider using motivational interview techniques during outreach. Use a positive and encouraging approach to highlight the benefit of getting vaccinated based on that population’s priorities. Identify incentives and ensure vaccine confidence messaging comes from that population’s trusted sources.
8. Provide vaccines in locations where people will feel comfortable going. Mass vaccination events are not appealing or accessible to everyone. Partner and coordinate with other vaccinators, including primary care providers, emergency services, and community-based organizations.