

OHA- ODE 03-02-22 Press Availability

Thank you, Director Gill.

I'd like to elaborate on some of the changes that are being made to the resiliency framework.

It's important to remember that while the worst of the current surge is behind us, COVID-19 still exists. It will continue to cause disease, even as we transition into a post-pandemic phase.

To those still battling the disease, helping a loved one recover or mourning the loss of a family member, you are in my thoughts.

As I told you Monday, we are seeing significantly lower daily cases, hospitalizations are steeply dropping to pre-Omicron levels and our percent positivity has dropped dramatically.

After March 11 the need to wear masks and take the other protections won't magically disappear. We must still exercise caution and common sense.

OHA continues to recommend vaccination for everyone who is eligible.

Universal masking as a primary protective measure is effective in schools, and we recommend mask wearing in communities with high level of spread.

Many Oregonians may choose to continue wearing masks. Those who are unvaccinated. Those who are immunocompromised. Those at higher risk for complications. Those who are 65 and older. Those who live with someone in one of these categories. Many people may still feel anxious and want to continue wearing a mask in indoor crowded settings.

Many students and staff in our schools will continue to wear masks, and we should all have patience, understanding and support for each person's decision.

What will change is some of the public health practices that we employed earlier in the pandemic.

We now have a significant proportion of the population with vaccination- or infection-induced immunity.

Given how quickly transmission occurs and, given the number of people who have no – or very mild – symptoms and do not come to the timely attention of public health, tools such as case investigation and contact tracing are no longer as effective in most settings.

That is why, once the mask requirements are lifted, we will be pausing contact tracing and quarantine for the general population, including K-12 school and childcare settings. OHA had already moved off universal case investigation and contact tracing for the general public.

These decisions align with new CDC guidance.

Contact tracing and quarantine will still be recommended for high-risk congregate settings, including health care, jails and prisons, and shelters.

Because quarantine will no longer be required in schools – regardless of vaccination status – test to stay will shift from a form of modified quarantine to enhanced exposure testing for those at highest risk.

Testing all exposed individuals in a population with high levels of immunity is neither feasible, nor needed.

Schools will continue to exclude individuals who have symptoms or a known COVID-19 infection, and the isolation period will remain at 5 days with a recommended additional 5 days of masking.

OHA recommends that schools continue to provide notifications to students and staff when there is a possible exposure.

We have, at long last, arrived at a stage in the pandemic where we can feel confident about relaxing more statewide approaches and giving individuals and communities the information and tools to lower their risk of getting COVID-19.

COVID-19 will continue to be part of our lives. We will remain vigilant and ready to respond to changes. But it should no longer *control* our lives.

Now we can take your questions.

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