

## **OHA- ODE 2-28-22 Press Availability**

Thank you, Director Gill

Today marks the 2nd anniversary of our first COVID-19 case in Oregon.

Since that time, we've experienced unprecedented disruption and loss. Oregon has logged more than 690,000 cases and more than 6,500 COVID-19 deaths.

Each death is a heart-breaking reminder of the threat COVID-19 poses to the people of our state. We've lost family members, friends, colleagues and neighbors. My thoughts go out to everyone who has lost someone to the virus.

My thoughts also go out to those still battling the disease or helping a loved one recover.

Since that first case, we've learned how to protect each other and our communities against COVID-19. We've also learned about the resilience and the resolve that Oregonians have shown in fighting back against the virus.

We've learned that, despite some very dark moments throughout the pandemic, the tools we have in place to keep people safe from the virus are working.

- 8 in 10 Oregonians continue to wear masks even as compliance has fallen off in other states. Moving forward, masks will continue to be an important protective tool for those most at risk.
- Nearly 8 in 10 Oregonians have received at least one dose of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine.

The fidelity Oregonians have shown in wearing masks, getting vaccinated then boosted and keeping socially distant has helped keep the virus from overtaking us and overtopping our hospitals.

COVID-19 hospitalizations are dropping steeply—and are far outpacing projections. Oregon’s hospitalization rates during the Omicron surge are a third lower than the national average, according to OHSU health scientists.

Only 30 days ago, OHA reported 1,125 COVID-19 hospitalizations and our expectations were dire. Today, we are reporting 479 hospitalizations – a 57% decline. At the present pace, hospitalizations could fall below pre-Omicron levels by next week.

That is why, today we can confidently announce another step forward in our response to COVID-19. In concert with California and Washington, we’ll lift indoor and school mask requirements on March 11th.

Our announcement follows updated CDC guidance for states on masks – but more importantly, it’s made possible by the continuing decline in hospitalizations we’ve seen in Oregon.

This welcome trend is a direct result of the protective measures Oregonians have employed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Your exemplary effort is driving this extraordinary progress. Thank you.

Some people may ask, based on the CDC’s recommendation, why can’t we lift mask requirements today?

It’s important to remember that under the CDC’s updated risk criteria, most counties in Oregon remain at “high risk.”

According to the CDC criteria, masks would remain required in schools and indoor locations in Bend, Medford, Pendleton, Roseburg and many other communities.

The CDC's risk criteria, which like our strategy here in Oregon, is focused on protecting hospital capacity, does not have the same granular level of hospital data that we do.

We are confident that, given the progress we've seen over the past several weeks, that the March 11th date provides a safe, and sensible glide path to lift these restrictions.

Two years after the COVID-19 nightmare began in Oregon, we have many losses to mourn. But we also can take heart and pride in the way Oregonians have come together to protect themselves and the people around them.

As we move forward, we need to treat each other with patience and grace. Based on our own risk factors – and circumstances around us – many will continue to wear masks and take other precautions. We need to support each other in our choices.

Thank you for all you've done to contain COVID-19 in Oregon.

Now we can take your questions.

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