

## **Oregon Health Authority Media Briefing, April 20, 2022**

### **Dr. Tom Jeanne, Deputy State Health Officer and Deputy State Epidemiologist**

Good morning, I'm Dr. Tom Jeanne, Deputy State Health Officer and Deputy State Epidemiologist with Oregon Health Authority. Thank you for joining us today for our latest update on the state's ongoing management of COVID-19. This is the first of our monthly media availabilities to provide an update on COVID-19 in Oregon.

It's now been a little more than month since OHA announced its priorities for the next phase of the pandemic and outlined that framework in the "RISE" plan: Resilience in Support of Equity. Our approach prioritizes protecting people at highest risk, reinvigorating our communities, and advancing our work to eliminate health inequity.

I want to provide an update on the measures that are still in place and what we know from our more recent data. In Oregon, the emergency phases of the COVID-19 response have ended. However, the pandemic is not over, and several measures remain in place. These include:

- Vaccination requirements for those who work in health care settings, congregate care settings, and K–12 schools.
- Mask requirements in health care, long-term care, and other congregate care settings.

Thanks to Oregonians' ongoing actions, including choosing to wear masks, getting vaccinated and boosted, and staying home when sick, our state has avoided the worse outcomes seen in other states. Oregon continues to rank among the most successful states in the country in our response, thanks to so many of our residents protecting each other, our vaccine providers who continue to serve all Oregonians, our health care workers, and the collective actions of our many local public health, community, and Tribal partners.

We continue to see relatively low numbers of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 illness, averaging fewer than 100 patients a day during April, a significant drop from the more than 1,100 hospitalized patients we saw during the Delta and Omicron surges. However, our daily case counts have seen a steady rise since their lows of 200 and 300 per day at the start of this month. The most recent

seven-day average is 600 cases per day as of April 19. We know from experience that hospitalizations tend to lag behind infections, so we expect those numbers to eventually rise, too.

It has been a little more than four weeks since the lifting of mask use in most settings, and some of the jump we see in case counts is likely tied to less mask use and more Oregonians gathering indoors and returning to pre-pandemic social activities. The proportion of cases that are reported to public health also has likely declined with more home tests available. We also know that we are confronting a particularly stubborn adversary, this time in the form of an Omicron subvariant known as BA.2, which is now the dominant variant in Oregon, as it is in most of the country.

A number of these factors are addressed in the state model forecast that is now released every other week by our colleagues at Oregon Health & Science University. The most recent model projects a slight increase in hospitalizations over the next two months. The good news is that it is expected to be far below the surge levels we saw late last summer and this past winter.

And there's more good news: Most Oregonians are now protected by safe and effective vaccines. More than 83% of all adults have been vaccinated and more than three in four adults have completed their vaccination series.

To those who have not yet received a vaccine, consider getting vaccinated at a vaccine provider near your home or at one of the larger vaccination clinics around the state. If you haven't discussed your vaccination status with your provider, consider that conversation on your next visit. For those who are eligible, consider getting a booster dose. Remember, all vaccines and booster doses are free to anyone, regardless of residency status, and are available in every county in Oregon.

Lastly, we want to encourage residents to develop a plan for themselves and those they care for. All of us will need to make decisions about the amount of risk we're willing to take. For most of us, this means understanding one's own level of risk based on our age, medical conditions, and vaccination status. For others that also means thinking about those who they live and work with. In addition to

having masks readily available, residents can also keep COVID-19 tests and a thermometer in one's home.

For those at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19, consider talking to your health care provider now. You may be eligible for early treatment in the event you get infected with COVID-19, and you can learn what the process would be like. If you do not have a health care provider, you can reach out to a local community health center or call 211.

OHA will continue to play an active role informing Oregonians of all backgrounds, languages, and cultures about the importance of vaccination and steps to take for individuals at risk of complications from COVID-19 . OHA also will continue its efforts encouraging residents to keep well-fitting masks at the ready when they go to work and out into the community. Wearing a mask is one of the simplest and least burdensome steps we can take to protect ourselves and others.

This pandemic has been difficult, but where we are now is a brighter spot. Unfortunately, we are not done with COVID-19 yet, but we are closer to normality than ever. We thank Oregonians for continuing to step up to protect themselves and their communities.

***And with that, I can now take some questions.***