

## Opening statement for Media gaggle 01-21-22

Thank you, Erica and good morning.

Let me begin today with a brief overview of the pandemic, then I will take your questions.

The Omicron variant continues to cut a destructive swath through Oregon, fueling steadily rising hospitalizations, record-shattering daily cases and staggering test positivity rates.

This is distressing for all of us. It has been two years of fighting this virus. We have lost family members and loved ones, friends, neighbors and colleagues.

We are all ready to move on – and continuing the efforts Oregonians have done throughout this pandemic. We will get through this and continue to save lives.

There is some light at the end of this very dark tunnel. The recent modeling suggests that cases could peak within the next week or so with hospitalizations – a lagging indicator – peaking in the following weeks.

More importantly, the forecast shows the difference all of us are making by continuing to take preventive steps. The projected peak for hospitalizations is about 1,500 in early February.

Without the widespread adherence we've seen from Oregonians the curve would be much steeper – about 1,900 hospitalizations.

But the present outlook remains gloomy.

- Today we are reporting yet another pandemic high in daily cases—10,947. Yesterday, we reported 10,034.

- Our COVID-19 Weekly Report for the week ending Jan. 16, reported a pandemic-record 52,337 daily cases, 11% more than last week, 3 times higher than the previous week.

We while we again recorded a weekly high for COVID-19 tests, the reported percent of test positivity hovers stubbornly at more than 20%.

- COVID-19 hospitalizations have risen sharply in recent days. Yesterday, OHA reported 60 new hospitalizations and since Monday alone, there have been 159 new hospitalizations.
- Since Jan. 1, COVID-19 related hospitalizations have climbed 127%.

Our hospitals, still reeling from the Delta surge, are now struggling under the additional stress of the Omicron onslaught. Earlier this week we passed 900 COVID-19 related hospitalizations. Today we are reporting over 1,000 and we are on the way to eclipsing last fall's record-highs.

These increases are not sustainable. We must do everything we can to ensure that there are enough available beds for everyone who experiences a medical emergency or needs hospital care.

We can do our part to ease the strain on our hospitals by getting vaccinated, and then boosted when eligible, by continuing to wear our masks, indoors and outdoors, and by keeping our gatherings small. And, by staying home if you are sick or if you test positive.

I'm often asked about where Oregon stands in relation to what we're seeing across the U.S. While cases in our urban enclaves have levelled somewhat, we are seeing surging cases and more serious illness in less vaccinated rural areas and among those elderly populations.

The critical difference here in Oregon is you.

National data shows that Oregonians wearing masks in greater numbers than in other states and models show that more of us are limiting our travel and watching their gatherings.

I want to thank the vast majority of Oregonians who continue to take these steps to protect themselves, their loved ones and our communities. Your actions have helped keep the death rate from COVID-19 among the lowest states.

Finally, I also want to thank the Oregonians who spoke at the public hearing yesterday about the mask rule in Oregon.

Many people shared their thoughts about masks. No one likes to wear masks – and all of us would like to move on without needing to wear them to prevent COVID-19. Your comments are valued.

When we all wear masks, we protect each other. As COVID-19 hospitalization rates in other communities who faced Omicron early show – and the most recent Oregon COVID-19 hospitalization forecast shows – we anticipate being in a position in the coming weeks when our hospitals are no longer strained to provide care to the Oregonians showing up for care.

We're a step closer to moving from changing plans because of COVID-19 surges, a step closer to celebrating life's milestones with loved ones this spring and a step closer to not having to wear masks regularly to protect the most vulnerable around us.

We need to continue standing strong against the virus to keep our hospital system viable and to ensure that everyone who needs medical

care can get it – whether you have COVID-19, need trauma care after a car crash or specialized care after a heart attack.

Let's continue looking out for each other. Get vaccinated, get boosted if you are due. Continue masking and limiting gatherings and stay home if you're feeling ill.

And with that, I'll be happy to take your questions.

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