

Governor's news conference (August 11, 2021) – Director Patrick Allen

Thank you, Governor Brown. I'm Patrick Allen, Director of the Oregon Health Authority.

Oregon hospitals are facing a crisis that threatens to eclipse the most severe bed shortages they've faced at any point in the pandemic. I want to talk about the steps the Oregon Health Authority is taking to help our hospitals avoid being swamped by this latest surge.

The highly contagious Delta variant is filling hospitals across Oregon with record levels of COVID-19 patients.

- On July 1, there were 134 COVID-19 patients in Oregon hospitals and 27 were in intensive care.
 - Yesterday, the population of hospitalized COVID-19 patients set a new pandemic record of 635 hospitalizations – a staggering 373 percent increase.
 - Over the same six-week period, COVID-19 related Intensive Care Unit admissions have increased more than 500 percent.
- Today, Oregon hospitals reported that there were 665 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 and 172 in intensive care. Those totals broke the high-water mark of COVID-19 hospitalizations and intensive care bed occupancy that Oregon hospitals set ***just yesterday***.
- Every hospital region in the state is experiencing escalating capacity constraints and strains on staff, beds, and specialized equipment.
- Discharges are slowing to a standstill across hospital regions.

And as you've heard the Governor and Dr. Sidelinger describe, the coming weeks will get worse if we don't take immediate action.

The crisis facing our hospitals stems from a crisis in our communities. COVID-19 is spreading uncontrollably among people who are unvaccinated.

- Yesterday, Oregon reported 2,329 new cases, the highest daily case total since the pandemic started.

- That surge in cases is sending more people to the hospital, including younger people, who represent a growing percentage of people whose cases are so severe they require a hospital admission.
- And because the Delta variant appears to make people sicker, on average patients are having to stay in the hospital longer.

Overcrowded hospitals have consequences for the lives of every single one of us – young and old, vaccinated and unvaccinated.

Across Oregon, many hospitals have been forced to postpone procedures because COVID-19 has filled so many beds with severely-ill patients that they don't have enough staff to perform procedures that people need, but that hospitals can safely delay.

For people living each day in pain, with limited mobility or an uncertain diagnosis, they'll have to wait longer for a back procedure, knee replacement or an exploratory surgery to ease their discomfort, restore quality of life, or simply give them peace of mind.

It also means hospitals packed with unvaccinated COVID-19 patients have fewer intensive care beds and staff available to treat people who have heart attacks, are hurt in accidents, or face another grave medical emergency.

None of us want to need an ICU bed, but we all expect them to be there if we, our kids, or other family members need one. Today those beds are much harder to come by and they will grow even more scarce if we don't stop the flood of COVID-19 cases.

Overcrowded hospitals also mean overwhelmed, over-taxed and over-stressed medical staff. Staff who are repeatedly exposed to more COVID-19 cases face greater risk of breakthrough infections. Staff illness and strain compound critical staffing shortages adversely affecting all patients.

The Oregon Health Authority is working closely with hospital administrators to support front-line nurses, doctors, and other hospital staff. Here are some of the steps we're taking to help hospitals:

- We're mobilizing nurse crisis teams to support hospitals facing the greatest demand.
- We're working with hospitals to maintain and expand patient care workforces where possible, so hospitals can operate more hospital beds.
- We're working with the Oregon Department of Human Services and long-term care facilities to move people who can be placed into community-based care facilities to free-up scarce hospital beds.
- We've established a command center where hospitals can work together to ensure respiratory equipment can be reallocated to hospitals around the state facing the most critical shortages of life-saving interventions.
- We're addressing funding issues that affect staffing and bed capacity, such as streamlining Medicaid coverage for eligible patients.

These actions can help hospitals weather the storm, but they won't stop it. The only actions that will stem this fifth and most threatening wave of COVID-19 infections are actions that stop transmission: wear a mask indoors and – most important of all – get vaccinated.

In Oregon, nearly 73 percent of adult Oregonians have been vaccinated, with at least one dose. Nearly 62 percent of our total population have received at least one shot. Almost 57 percent of Oregonians are fully vaccinated. Oregon continues to outpace the national averages for first and second doses and we are currently ranked 12th in the nation for the percentage of fully vaccinated people.

More Oregonians are getting vaccinated each day. The number of new people getting vaccinated each day is rising:

- On August 5, the number of people who received a first dose was 4,333. Two weeks earlier, it was 2,433. That's a 44 percent increase.
- Over the past 2 weeks, we've seen some of our largest percentage increases in counties such as Marion, Jefferson, and Umatilla counties, which have been trailing in vaccination rates.

But in the face of the Delta variant, we need more people to get vaccinated now.

As you've heard, the Delta variant poses an unprecedented threat because it is more contagious and more severe. Unvaccinated adults and children are highly vulnerable to catching the Delta variant, getting sick, and spreading it.

If you haven't made the choice to get vaccinated yet, Delta is the game-changer that gives you a reason to reconsider.

Haven't been able to find the time to get a shot? Get vaccinated before the Delta variant finds you.

Worried about side-effects? About 1 in 5 people experience passing side-effects from the vaccines. But getting sick or hospitalized with the Delta variant lasts longer than the side-effects, and the symptoms can be severe.

Some people have questions about long-term effects from the vaccines. Over the past nine months, nearly 200 million Americans and more than 2.5 million Oregonians have received at least one dose vaccine. The vaccines have proven to be safe and effective for hundreds of millions of people with no evidence of long-term effects. The federal government is preparing to grant full approval to the first of the vaccines this fall.

Think your immune system is healthy and strong enough to fight off the Delta variant? Your immune system, no matter how tough, can't fight a pathogen it can't recognize. The vaccines equip your immune system with the tools it needs to defeat Delta.

It's natural to have questions. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective against COVID-19, including the Delta variant. The sooner you get vaccinated, the sooner you and others around you – such as younger kids – are protected from COVID-19.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccine safety, effectiveness and availability, go to: covidvaccine.oregon.gov.

And now I'll turn it back over to Governor Brown.