

Governor's media briefing (May 11, 2021)

Thank you, Governor Brown. I'm Patrick Allen, Director of the Oregon Health Authority. This afternoon I want to:

- Share more information about the vaccination targets Governor Brown announced and how we're measuring them.
- Tell you which counties are meeting, or close to meeting, the targets we've set.
- Describe the steps OHA and our local partners are taking to help counties reach those goals and safely reopen, without leaving any communities behind.

I'm joined by Rachael Banks, our public health director, and Dr. Dean Sidelinger, our state health officer. They'll be available to answer questions, including questions you may have about our county partnerships and the FDA's decision to issue an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer vaccine for children and youth ages 12–15.

I want to underscore Governor Brown's message: The county and statewide vaccination targets she announced today stand as a pivotal point in the pandemic.

- For the first time since COVID-19 reached Oregon, we'll know when we can retire most of the restrictions we've had to rely on to protect us during the time we've been most vulnerable to this novel virus.
- For the first time since the start of the pandemic, we'll have a clearer picture of how close we are to truly containing COVID-19 in Oregon. Every person who chooses to get vaccinated means the virus has:
 - Fewer ways to spread and mount any more surges in hospitalizations and deaths and less chance to mutate in dangerous ways that could spiral us back into high risk.
- For the first time since the start of the pandemic, we'll be able to say the virus no longer controls the timelines in our lives. We do — ***if enough Oregonians make the choice to get vaccinated.***

However, we can't pretend the pandemic is over. By themselves, these COVID-19 vaccination targets don't achieve herd immunity or starve the virus of any way to spread.

By tying vaccination rates to reductions in risk levels, these targets recognize the sacrifices Oregonians have made in achieving one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates in the nation. They reward the progress counties can make in their vaccination rates. And they restore greater certainty to businesses that have been buffered by each wave of COVID-19's resurgence.

At a time when vaccination rates are unfortunately slowing across the nation, can we reach these goals?

Let's start by looking at where we stand right now. Overall, Oregon continues to sustain a greater rate of vaccination growth than most other states as we rise up the national rankings.

- **As of today, just under 2 million Oregonians have received at least one dose of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine.**
 - According to the latest data, 1,994,968 have received at least one shot.
 - Overall, 1,490,512 Oregonians are fully vaccinated.
- **According to data from the CDC, 60% of Oregonians who are 18 or older and have received at least one vaccination.**
 - Oregon vaccinators have now administered at least one shot to 49% of our total population, according to the CDC. Oregon now ranks 21st in the nation (including D.C.) in the percentage of our total population who've received at least one dose. The national average is 46%.
 - Oregon ranks 24th in the nation in the percentage of our total population who are fully vaccinated. Thirty-six percent of all Oregonians are fully vaccinated.
- **Over the past week, our daily average of shots in arms remained above the rate of vaccines administered per day that we will need to reach the targets Governor Brown announced:**
 - To hit 70% of adult Oregonians vaccinated with at least one dose by the end of June, Oregon would need to administer 8,700 first doses per day over the next seven weeks.

- As of yesterday, Oregon is averaging a total of 34,869 first and second doses each day.

As we track Oregon's vaccination targets going forward, here are a few reminders to note:

- **We will use CDC's calculation of percentage of people who are 18+ to track our progress toward our state-level target to vaccinate 7 in 10 adult Oregonians as the marker to lift the risk metrics.**
 - We'll use the CDC figures for two reasons:
 - The CDC data offers a more comprehensive, complete and accurate picture of total vaccinations in Oregon because the federal data includes vaccinations administered by the Veterans Administration, Indian Health Service and other federal entities.
 - The CDC data also enables us to compare our progress against the same goal the Biden administration has set for the nation. (As a side note, CDC includes everyone who is 16 and older in their 18+ data.)
- **However, the CDC data is not reliable at the county level, because it doesn't have enough county of residence information for people who are vaccinated through those federal entities.**
 - For county vaccination rates, we'll rely on Oregon's ALERT Immunization Information System.

But measuring our overall progress isn't enough. We need to ensure that we are closing the gap in vaccination rates across racial and ethnic demographic and we achieve parity in vaccination rates for communities of color. They've been hit hardest by the pandemic.

As this slide shows:

- All the non-white categories (except American Indians/Alaskan Natives) grew faster than the white population over the past 14 days.
- In the past two weeks:
 - The number of people who were vaccinated and identify as Latino, Latina or Latinx grew at a 24% rate of growth.

- The number of people who were vaccinated and identify as Black also grew at 23% rate of growth.
- Both these groups outpaced the number of people who were vaccinated and identify as white, which grew at 13% rate of growth.

We still have a long way to go. However, it's encouraging to see so many local partners working together to close the under-vaccination rate among communities of color.

From the coast to frontier counties, community-based organizations, federally qualified health centers, local health departments and regional health systems are holding pop-up clinics, intensifying outreach and taking other steps to reach under-vaccinated communities. The numbers show it's making a difference.

I'll talk more about how we are holding counties accountable for continuing to close this gap in a moment.

Now let's take a closer look at when and if we might be able to vaccinate 70% of adult Oregonians.

As this slide shows, our vaccination targets are in reach and it's possible we can exit the statewide risk metrics before July 4, even if we see a dip in our current vaccination rates.

- **Based on our current trajectory**, Oregon is currently on track to overshoot our target and actually vaccinate **8 in 10** adults by mid- to late-June. That trajectory is shown by the bright green line on the top of the graph.
- However, while we've maintained a 3% week-over-week growth rate, we've seen our daily number of doses administered begin to slip slightly. So, what if our current trajectory changes?
 - **If that slight weakening in our daily average turned into a 25% drop in our vaccination rate growth**, we'd still expect to have vaccinated 70% of adults by mid- to late-June. That trajectory is shown by the lighter green line.
 - **If the bottom fell out and our vaccination rate dropped by 50%**, we'd still expect to have vaccinated 70% of adults before July 1. That trajectory is shown by the red line.

- **If we see what we believe is the most likely trend — vaccinations slow by 10% and plateau at that level** — Oregon should still expect to have vaccinated 7 in 10 adults around the third week in June, still about two weeks ahead of the federal target. That trajectory is shown by the yellow line.

But what about the counties? How many counties can expect to reach 65% before summer? How many people does each county have to vaccinate to hit the level where they can drop to Low Risk, or lift the risk metrics? As you can see in this chart:

- **Two counties (Benton and Hood River) have already vaccinated more than 65% of adult residents.** They are ready to move to Low Risk on May 21, unless they opt out or do not submit an equity plan.
- **Four counties (Deschutes, Lincoln, Multnomah and Washington) have vaccinated more than 60% of their adult population.** They likely will reach 65% soon and should be ready to move to Low Risk by May 21, unless they opt out or do not submit an equity plan.
- **Five counties (Clackamas, Clatsop, Lane, Polk and Tillamook) have vaccinated more than 55% of their adult population.** If these counties maintain healthy week-over-week rates of growth in vaccinations, they should be eligible to move to Low Risk before the entire state reaches the target of vaccinating 70% of adults.

When you look at these counties, they include rural and urban communities. They span the coast, the Willamette valley and the east side of the mountains. We know that the different points of view that characterize so much of the national discussion can get carried into issues at the state level, such as vaccinations.

But these counties show that you can't make assumptions about Oregonians and every county can protect its residents by hitting a high vaccination rate, no matter its geographical location or partisan orientation.

What about the remaining counties?

- **While other counties are further behind, many have relatively small numbers to reach to achieve the 65% target.**

- For example, Umatilla County needs to reach fewer people to hit 65% than Clackamas or Lane counties, even though Umatilla is much further behind as a percentage.

So, what are we doing to help counties hit these targets? And how will the Oregon Health Authority partner with counties to not only make sure counties continue to expand vaccination rates, but also achieve parity across all their racial and ethnic communities?

Over the coming month, you'll see a shift in focus away from mass vaccination clinics toward a less centralized approach.

The mass vaccination strategy was essential to quickly immunizing large numbers of people and managing the process of prioritizing limited eligibility when we had limited doses.

- I want to thank our health system partners for taking on this difficult task and operating these clinics with such impressive efficiency. We've vaccinated 2 million people and outpaced most other states thanks to their efforts.

However, appointments at mass vaccination sites are starting to slow down. Now we need to transition to the next phase of the vaccination strategy, which is designed to better address the needs of people who have not yet chosen to get vaccinated.

- As the pace of vaccinations has slackened across the nation, you hear a lot about people who are **resistant** to vaccinations and won't be convinced to get one.
- You hear a lot about people who are **vaccine-hesitant**. They're wary or skeptical, but they still haven't made up their minds.
- Then there are people I think fit a different category: **vaccine-inconvenient**. People in this group aren't opposed to getting a vaccine. They just have not prioritized taking the time out of their demanding lives to do so.

Our Phase 2 strategy is designed to make it simpler and easier for vaccine-hesitant and vaccine-inconvenient people to get immunized.

In coming weeks, we'll continue to move doses to familiar places where people typically get a flu shot or other vaccinations, such as:

- Outpatient clinics operated by a health system or an independent clinic; or
- Inpatient clinics at hospitals.

We'll also shift clinic locations from mass vaccination sites to smaller, community-based sites, such as schools. We'll work with county health officials and CBO partners to stand up more pop-up, community-based vaccine events. We'll work with our local partners to create clinics at other mid-sized, closer-to-home and culturally responsive locations in the community.

Finally, I want to talk about the way OHA will work with counties to ensure we close the vaccination gap for communities who've been hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic.

As Governor Brown described, before a county can move to "Low Risk," they will have to both:

- Vaccinate 65% of their population ages 16 and older with at least a first dose.
- Submit a plan that demonstrates that local public health officials are committed to working with community partners to maximize meaningful, low-barrier access to vaccines for historically marginalized communities and reduce vaccination inequities.
 - The earliest a county may move to Low Risk is May 21, 2021.
 - Any county that meets the vaccination rate target and opts to move to Low Risk would need to submit their vaccination equity plan by May 14, 2021.
 - Public health staff at OHA will review the plan for adequacy and completeness and have a follow-up discussion with the county.
 - Any movement in risk level would be announced on May 18 and the change in risk levels would take effect on May 21.
 - We'll follow that weekly cycle going forward. However, we encourage all counties to submit their plans well in advance of the weeks they want to change risk levels.

In reviewing County Equity Responses, OHA staff will look for:

- Plans to conduct effective outreach to those who have not been vaccinated.
- Steps counties are taking to ensure that vaccine sites are culturally responsive, linguistically appropriate and accessible to people with disabilities or other unique access needs.
- Partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) to address inequities in vaccinations.
- Partnerships with employers to ensure that agricultural workers and other front-line workers have access to vaccines.
- Plans to reach people experiencing homelessness and other people who are at risk of severe COVID-19 illness or death.
- Activities to strengthen vaccine confidence in their community.

OHA will support these local efforts by:

- Sharing effective outreach strategies developed in partnership with organizations serving communities of color.
- Grants to counties to reduce vaccine inequities.
- Distributing weekly data reports with counties to help them track progress.
- Connections to CBOs who can partner to increase vaccinations.

Once counties have demonstrated they're making progress to implement their plans throughout the summer and close the vaccination gap in their community, we'll release the second allotment of funding.

In closing, I want to say to everyone who hasn't been able to get vaccinated: Vaccination is a personal choice — and the more people who choose to get vaccinated, the sooner we can all get back to seeing the people we love, doing the things we enjoy and returning to the normal ways we live our lives.

Medical experts continue to tell us the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. And they're free.

It's normal to have questions about the COVID-19 vaccines and there are many places you can get your questions answered, starting with covidvaccines.oregon.gov.

Find out where you can get a vaccine so you can keep yourself and the people you love safe from COVID-19.

And with that, I'll turn it back over to Governor Brown.