

Talking Points for 01-28-22 Media Gaggle

Thank you, Erica and good morning.

Before I update you on where things stand in the pandemic, I want to offer best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery to our Director Pat Allen, who as you know, was injured recently.

He is recuperating at home and we hope to have him back with us, and before you, soon.

This week, we passed another sad pandemic milestone – the 6,000th COVID-19-related death in Oregon.

That is 6,000 of our friends, neighbors and colleagues lost to the virus. Every death represents lost love, laughter and memories for families and friends. An empty seat at the dinner table. A missing person in a family picture.

These losses serve as sobering reminders that COVID-19 remains a formidable foe and the wrenching impact on our lives is not behind us - yet.

COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to rise steeply, raising the possibility of eclipsing the pandemic high for COVID-19 related hospitalizations within days.

Last Friday, we surpassed 1,000 hospitalizations. Five days later, we topped 1,100.

Yesterday, OHA reported an increase of 69 additional COVID-19 patients in our hospitals, the highest daily total in the Omicron surge.

The COVID-19 Weekly Report for the week ending Jan. 23, reported 638 COVID-19-related hospitalizations – a 45% increase over the previous week and the highest weekly total since early September.

We may be starting to see a slight slowing of Omicron's momentum.

True to the recent modeling, statewide daily cases appear to have crested from the pandemic highs, offering a glimmer of hope in an otherwise bleak pandemic landscape.

But as I said last week, even if cases have leveled, it will take weeks for hospitalizations to peak and then return down to levels that are not stressing our hospital system.

Our hospitals are struggling to maintain the fragile balance between providing care for people who are ill with the virus and others needing medical care.

I want to once again thank every Oregonian who continues to take actions to protect themselves, their loved ones and neighbors. The actions we take over the next several weeks will be critical to ensuring that our hospitals have enough capacity to meet the needs of all patients needing care.

That means getting vaccinated, and then boosted when eligible, continuing to wear our masks, indoors and outdoors in crowds, and keeping our gatherings small. Staying home if you are sick or if you test positive.

It also means extending protective measures that were enacted earlier in the pandemic requiring mask wearing in schools and health care settings and requiring vaccinations for school employees and health care workers and wearing masks in indoor settings. These rules are being submitted to the Secretary of State today and in the coming days.

Our hospital system is nearing a breaking point. **We are simply not yet at a point where we can consider relaxing these crucial protections.**

These protections are critical to protect the residents in our long-term and congregate care facilities and our health care workers. These protections are critical to ensuring that our school-aged children, their teachers and staff can conduct in person instruction every day.

These measures will not be in place forever. But they are needed now.

As we have throughout the pandemic, we will continue analyzing the data and develop reasonable metrics and a thoughtful process for discontinuing these measures when it is safe.

Public comment on the general mask rule for indoor public spaces is still being reviewed.

Let me close today, by talking a little bit about booster doses.

As has been clear for weeks now, we will fall short of our goal to get 1 million Oregonians a booster dose by the end of January.

The purpose of setting the goal was to promote the effectiveness of boosters as a shield against the Omicron variant.

It is disappointing to fall short of the goal. But the good news is that nearly 500,000 Oregonians have taken the opportunity to receive a booster. Thank you.

That's nearly a half-million people who are better protected from the virus. Thank you. Nearly half a million people who are far less likely to spread the disease to others. Thank you. Nearly half a million people who are now far less likely to occupy a critically needed hospital bed because of the virus. Thank you.

Every booster shot administered gets us closer to the goal we all want to attain – an end to the pandemic in Oregon.

Let's look at how our state compares among U.S. states in vaccinations and boosters, according to CDC data.

- We're 10th among all states and D.C. in percent of total population – children and adults -- who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster dose
- We're 10th in the percentage of people 18 and older who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster dose.
- We're 12th among all states and D.C. in percentage of people 65 and older who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster dose.
- And our total vaccination dose rate is 18th best among all states and D.C.

My thoughts go out to all Oregonians who are battling this virus, those worried about family members in the hospital and those mourning the loss of a loved one. The pain of COVID is still great.

But, we can all do our part to blunt this newest surge by continuing to wear our masks, stay home when we're sick, get vaccinated, and when it's our turn, by getting a booster shot.

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

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