



August 5, 2021

If there is one thing that the past few weeks have shown us, it is that we should always be prepared for rapid changes with COVID-19. The arrival of the Delta variant has dramatically changed the situation in our county. The rise in cases seen in many counties has now hit here, with 400% increases in cases in a matter of a few weeks. Along with this was a dramatic rise in hospitalizations, peaking at 25 hospitalizations for COVID-19 as of a few days ago.

We suspect this may go higher, and we are watching the situation in the hospitals closely. In previous surges the hospitalizations remained well under 20 beds. The hospital staff, clinic staff, public health staff, really everyone in health care, who have all been working tirelessly for 18 months to treat and prevent COVID-19 were dealt a devastating blow with this news. Many in the community are noticing more illness, voluntarily cancelling events due to concern, returning to safety measures that were taken during the last COVID-19 surges.

It was with this urgent necessity that Public Health decided, in consultation with many community leaders across our county, to reinstate the mask mandate effective 12:01AM Saturday August 7th. We take this step to preserve the balance in our rural healthcare system that is already under a tremendous amount of strain, to ensure that we can keep businesses open, keep events ongoing safely, and to keep schools on track towards full reopening in just a few weeks.

We would like to share publicly data on the current surge from our Humboldt County Epidemiology Program. Please find attached a graph that shows the case rate for both unvaccinated and fully vaccinated populations in our county. You can see the steep rise of cases with this latest Delta surge, much larger than the two previous surges (winter surge with Epsilon, spring surge with Alpha). And you can see the stark difference in both cases and hospitalizations among the fully vaccinated in Humboldt County. Our local data is consistent with what is seen nationally with Delta variant. While we are seeing some breakthrough cases, we are also seeing a very large reduction in hospitalizations and death among the fully vaccinated, which reinforces the importance of getting vaccinated.

There have been many ups and downs in this pandemic. This is another one of those big pendulum swings, and given the course so far, it is unlikely to be the last one. The hospitals are preparing for potentially even more surge of cases in the coming weeks, as they have prepared in the past. Public Health is scaling up testing and investigations again, as we have several times throughout the pandemic to deal with surges. In the end, vaccination will remain the key tool to getting us out of the pandemic by preventing severe disease and death from COVID-19. We urge everyone who is eligible to seek out vaccination. If you are unsure, please seek out a trusted source on vaccine information from your community.

