



BOS Update 12.3.2021

With the very high COVID-19 case levels Humboldt County saw during the Delta surge now behind us, Humboldt County has settled into seeing steady but still continued high levels of COVID-19 in our community. This is reflected by the CDC Data Tracker where our county remains mostly in the red/high transmission rate with some brief dips to the orange/substantial transmission rates over the past week. Some reporting lags due to the Thanksgiving holiday briefly dipped the county to the yellow/moderate rate due to labs and public health being closed. While the trend is greatly improved, the impact of COVID-19 on our local healthcare system, especially the hospitals, is still being felt. Daily the hospitals still deal with large numbers of COVID-19 patients, impacting their ability to care for other routine diseases and injuries. COVID-19 infections in people who are unvaccinated continue to make up the large majority of hospitalizations and deaths here in Humboldt County as they do worldwide.

Our most recent county-level data has been encouraging with vaccination numbers showing 74% of the eligible population with at least one shot. That means that nearly 3 out of every 4 people in our county who are eligible believe in and trust the science that will end this pandemic. And while we continue to see a very small numbers of fully vaccinated COVID-19 infections become hospitalized, these fully vaccinated hospitalizations are exclusively in those who are at the highest risk due to age or health conditions. The vaccine is working extremely well protecting the vast majority of those who got a vaccine. Of those with COVID-19 who end up hospitalized by this deadly disease, the unvaccinated are on average nearly 20 years younger than those who are fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated people who become infected are 14 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than their vaccinated neighbors, and our local data shows the unvaccinated are dying 13 years younger on average than their vaccinated counterparts. These numbers are truly incredible and speak to the power of these vaccines and their ability to reduce severe COVID-19 disease resulting in hospitalization and death. Additionally, the more vaccinated people we have in our community, the less COVID-19 will spread to others as fully vaccinated infections are half as likely to pass on to family and neighbors compared to an infection in an unvaccinated person. Protecting ourselves with a vaccine against COVID-19 not only protects ourselves, but it also protects our friends, family, and neighbors who might be more vulnerable than we are. The medical doctors of Humboldt County ask that we all take action to protect not only ourselves, but our community, by getting vaccinated and boosted now.

Other than vaccination, our most important remaining tools for controlling the COVID-19 pandemic are masking and testing. With the news of the global emergence of the new Omicron variant, it is more important than ever to keep up these pandemic protections. Given our local masking order still in place, we fare better than other states and counties that lack a masking



order. In coordination with CDC and CDPH, our local Humboldt County Public Health Laboratory has developed the capacity to quickly identify Omicron should it arrive in our county. We encourage anyone who is returning from international travel to get a PCR test that will allow public health officials to search for the Omicron variant specifically, something that a rapid antigen test can't determine. If you test positive on a rapid antigen or home test, and you have travelled outside of the United States in the past 14 days, we strongly recommend you seek out PCR testing to help identify Omicron. Call your doctor or the Joint Information Center to be directed to PCR testing (707-441-5000).

With the Pfizer vaccine now authorized for ages 5 to 11 over the past month, we have seen a large increase in our partially vaccinated population. Nearly 20% of the 5-11 age group now has one dose of the vaccine, locally surpassing the state average. We know there are more than 10,000 Humboldt residents with only partial vaccination who still need to complete their vaccination series. By completing the vaccination series you will benefit from the most protection as an individual and help to slow the spread of the disease to family and friends. With Delta variant widespread already in our community, and likely Omicron to be circulating widely in the US in the near future, being fully vaccinated offers the most protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Being fully vaccinated reduces the likelihood of spreading COVID-19 to close contacts in your schools, workplaces, places of worship, and families.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved emergency use authorization of their new pill called molnupiravir. The company is reporting that this new drug treatment cuts the risk of hospitalization and death by around 30% for patients with mild-to-moderate COVID-19. Adding this easy-to-use pill to the already widely available monoclonal antibody treatments we have continues to show us how these advancements in medicine have led to the reduction of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 and getting back to normal more quickly. We are grateful for these incredible scientific advances.

Each day and week that goes by during the pandemic can feel like forever. We've all been at this together for 20 months, and the weariness is showing. With improving vaccination rates, increasing options for treatments, and other advances in the scientific understanding of this virus and the diseases it causes, we continue to move closer to the finish line. We won't likely ever see a world without COVID-19, but we hope to soon be at a place where COVID-19 joins the likes of other serious respiratory viruses like influenza in that we can manage the threat without need for public health intervention. Each vaccination series completed, booster shot given, each person who gets a COVID-19 shot gets us that much closer to a world where we can live more normally with this deadly new disease.

