

Governor Kate Brown
Press Conference: Omicron Update
December 17, 2021

Good morning, we're here to give an update on COVID-19 in Oregon. I'm joined by:

- Director Patrick Allen of the Oregon Health Authority;
- Dr. Dean Sidelinger, our State Epidemiologist;
- Dr. Renee Edwards, Chief Medical Officer at the Oregon Health & Science University; and
- Dr. Peter Graven, Lead Data Scientist at OHSU's Business Intelligence Unit.

As you all know, this week we identified the first cases of the Omicron variant in Oregon. It was only a matter of time before Omicron arrived in our state. Unfortunately, it's here just as we seem to be reaching the tail end of the Delta surge.

We are all still learning about this new variant. However, we're seeing across the globe that it spreads quickly. I will let Dr. Graven share more, but what is clear from the experiences of the UK and other countries is that we have only weeks to prepare before Omicron hits our communities and health care systems in full force.

I've asked the teams at OHA and OHSU to share with you what we know about Omicron, and what it means for Oregon.

I know that bracing for a new variant as we head into our second pandemic holiday season is not what we all hoped for.

Exactly one year ago this week, we came together to celebrate the first COVID vaccinations in Oregon. We watched with excitement, and frankly a huge sigh of relief, as health care workers from across our state received their first dose.

Since then, 65.4% of Oregonians have stepped up and become fully vaccinated. That's nearly 5% above the national average. Eight in 10 Oregonians 65 years and older have received a vaccine series. And now, our kiddos five and older are eligible. Parents, we encourage you to get your kids vaccinated. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Boosters are now widely available, and every Oregonian 16 years and older is eligible depending upon when you received your vaccine.

We have certainly come a long way. And yet, this virus continues to keep us on our toes.

The modeling Dr. Graven will share today may be disheartening for everyone. I know we are all ready for COVID-19 to be over.

So let me say this. If you take one thing away from today's press conference, let it be this: Get your booster shot. Boosters work, and are incredibly effective at continuing your protection against this virus and hospitalization.

If you aren't yet vaccinated, now is the time. This can be a matter of life or death. If you have questions about the vaccines, reach out to your health care provider or visit [GetVaccinated.Oregon.gov](https://www.getvaccinated.oregon.gov).

As Omicron is spreading, more states are starting to follow Oregon's lead in reinstating mask requirements. Thank you to every Oregonian who continues to mask up. You are making a difference.

Masks, vaccines, and the incredible efforts of our health care workers, public health partners, and National Guard members have seen us through the Delta surge. We will need to make the same statewide, collaborative efforts to see us through Omicron.

OHSU's modeling shows that we have about a three-week window to prepare for this next surge.

We are going to do everything we can to maximize that window. Director Allen will outline the important steps the State will be taking to make sure our most vulnerable Oregonians have access to booster shots and to make sure we are ready to support our hospital systems for another surge.

A big part of that plan will depend on each and every one of you.

The science and data are clear: vaccinations are the strongest line of defense we have against COVID-19 — and the preliminary research shows boosters provide a critical layer of protection against the Omicron variant.

Today I am calling on one million Oregonians to step up and get their booster dose by the end of January. I've directed OHA to get the vaccine supply and distribution capacity in place to support this goal. However, we will only reach it if everyone does their part.

I know that, in some parts of the state, it has been more difficult to get an appointment for a booster. We also know that for some communities, particularly our families with low incomes, access to a booster can be challenging. Please be patient as OHA works with our local partners in the next several days to ramp up access and capacity. I'll let Director Allen speak more about those efforts.

Oregonians never cease to amaze me with their respect for one another during times of crisis. I know we will get through this next surge as we did the last one — by working together.

Before I turn it over to Dr. Graven, I want to thank our health care and other essential workers for all they are doing to help Oregon. I know you are tired and frustrated. We couldn't get through this pandemic without you. Thank you for showing up every single day.

And to our National Guard members: I had the privilege of visiting with some of you this week who were demobilizing from our Delta surge hospital mission. You always answer our call for help. Oregon is better off because of it. Thank you for your service.

I also want to thank your families, as well as the many employers across the state, from Intel to our small businesses, for enabling you to serve. I know there are business owners who have stepped away from their own companies to serve on this mission, like Luke Leonard Concrete in West Linn, and Andrew Harding General Contracting out of Portland, to name a few. Thank you for your extraordinary efforts.

With that, I will turn it over to Dr. Graven.