

Sisters continues to navigate pandemic

Sisters continues to ride a rollercoaster of ups and downs in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many Sisters students returned to in-person education at local schools as Governor Kate Brown adjusted the rules under which students could return to class. The surge in cases that has battered Oregon since the fall appears to have been abated, with daily case reports in Deschutes County declining from peak levels — though they continue to add up.

The Sisters 97759 zip code has seen 161 total cases as of January 20.

The region is not out of the woods. Last week, St. Charles Health System reported an outbreak of COVID-19 cases at the St. Charles Redmond hospital campus. An outbreak is defined as a cluster of cases that are related.

To date, 33 caregivers had tested positive for COVID-19, their cases are investigated in collaboration with Deschutes County Health Services and the Oregon Health Authority. The hospital later announced that the source of the outbreak had been traced to a single patient.

According to the hospital, the patient — who had underlying health conditions that at times made it difficult to wear a mask — was admitted to St. Charles Redmond on December 31 and was initially tested twice for COVID-19. Because both tests resulted negative, St. Charles caregivers continued to wear droplet precaution personal protective equipment (PPE).

On January 6, the patient was tested a third time for COVID-19, and that test resulted positive.

After performing an investigation with the assistance of Deschutes County Health Services and the Oregon Health Authority, St. Charles' Infection Prevention team determined the Redmond caregivers' droplet precaution PPE was overwhelmed by prolonged exposure to the highly-symptomatic COVID-positive patient.

"The important learning

from this outbreak is that negative COVID-19 test results are not foolproof," said Dr. Jeff Absalon, St. Charles' chief physician executive. "In spite of negative test results, if a patient is highly symptomatic, we will need to treat them as if they are COVID-19 positive and aerosolizing, in which case the higher level of PPE is required."

The incident illustrates the difficulty of identifying and evading infection.

"We hope our community understands and will help us by following all COVID-19 restrictions, both inside and outside of our facilities," said Redmond hospital CEO Aaron Adams. "The number of positive COVID-19 cases continues to be high throughout the region and we need your help to ensure we have a healthy workforce to care for you and your loved ones."

The hospital emphasizes that it continues to be critically important for individuals to wear masks, as well as practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene.

In a press conference on Friday, Governor Brown and the Oregon Health Authority offered a timeline for vaccinations.

Vaccination timelines

JANUARY 25:

- Phase 1A: 67 percent of first doses administered (approximately 270,000 first doses administered)
- Educators eligible for vaccination

WEEK OF JANUARY 31:

- Phase 1A: 72 percent complete (approximately 290,000 first doses to administer)

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 7:

- Educators: 57 percent complete (approximately 85,000 first doses to administer)
- Seniors 80 and over eligible

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 14:

- Seniors 75 and over eligible (approximately 36 percent of total senior/educator population vaccinated)

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 21:

- Seniors 70 and over eligible (approximately 32 percent of total senior/educator population vaccinated)

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 28:

- Seniors 65 and over eligible (approximately 29 percent of total senior/educator population vaccinated)

WEEK OF MAY 2:

- Provide enough doses to achieve 78 percent of total senior/educator population vaccinated)

Vaccine delivery has proved to be rocky. NPR reported last week that vaccine manufacturers Pfizer and Moderna face significant challenges in meeting targets.

"The companies promised to deliver 100 million doses apiece to the United States by the end of March," NPR reported. "But they'll need

to make huge leaps in a short time to meet that goal. In the last few weeks, they've each been steadily delivering about 4.3 million doses a week, according to an NPR examination of vaccine allocation data. But to hit their targets

of 100 million doses on time, they each need to deliver 7.5 million doses a week for the next nine weeks."

Meanwhile, Oregon has reported three cases of the variant COVID-19 virus strain originally detected in the United Kingdom. That variant is considered to be more contagious.

So, Sisters celebrates small signs of progress, while keeping a wary — and weary — eye on the ongoing spread of COVID-19 and the vaccine developed to quell it. And OHA continues to urge adhering to the personal protocols that can inhibit spread:

- Maintain six feet of physical distance;

- Wear a face covering when outside the house;

- Practice good hand hygiene;

- Avoid gatherings with people you don't live with;

- People who experience symptoms — even mild ones — are urged to consult with a medical provider quickly to get instructions on how to care for themselves and their household members, and whether to get tested.

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