

# Biden and Brown shift vaccine doses to where demand is high

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SALEM — Hoping to pick up the pace of vaccinations, state and federal health officials are ditching their population-based distribution game plans to get more doses where they are wanted and needed.

President Joe Biden wants 70% of American adults fully vaccinated by July 4. The goal translates to about 160 million people. As of late last week, 105 million American adults were fully vaccinated.

To get there, Biden announced Tuesday, May 4, that he was ending the system that sent weekly shipments of vaccine to states in amounts based on their population.

The move will send more vaccine to places where demand is high, with additional supply drawn from areas where vaccine sits unused in medical refrigerators.

Allotments to states that do not want or cannot use more vaccine will go into a federal “vaccine bank.” States where shots are in demand will be able to order up to 50% more than their current allotments.

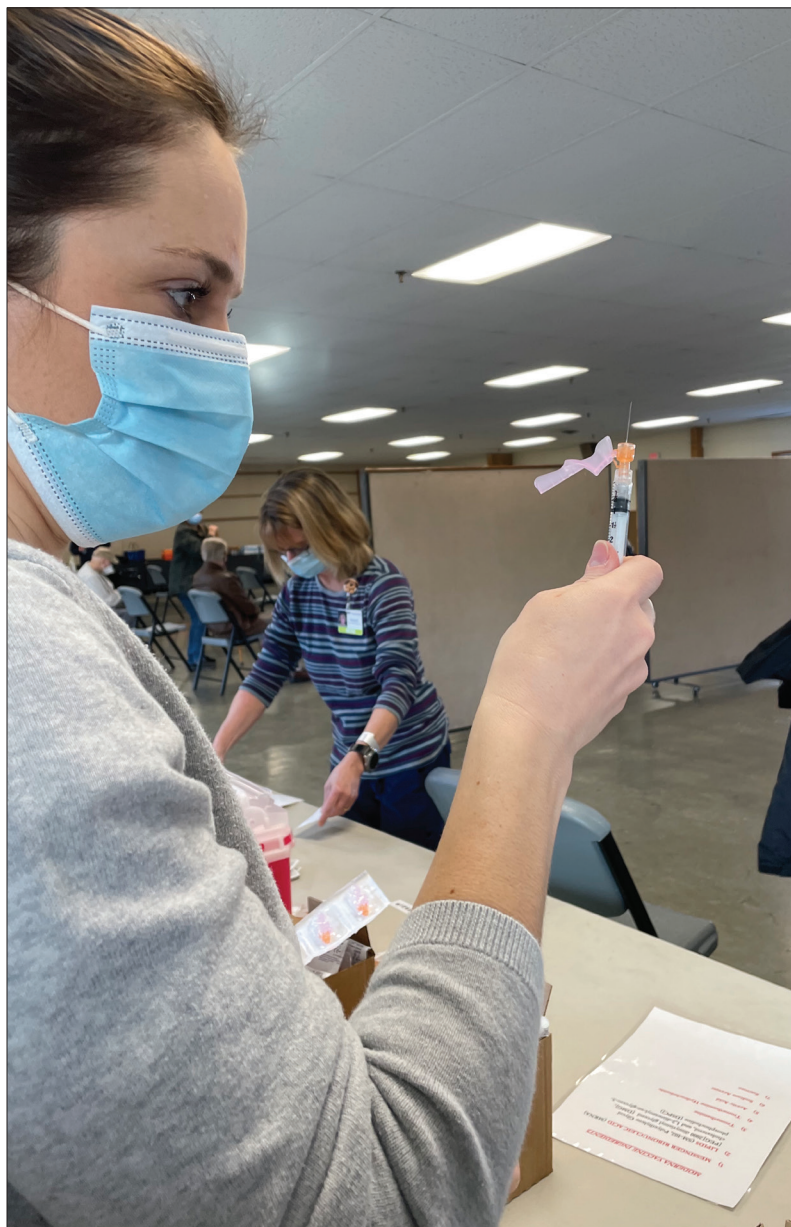
Oregon, California and Michigan are among states saying they still need more vaccine to meet demand. On the flip side, West Virginia has reported a surplus of vaccine and Arkansas officials said the state no longer wants weekly shipments.

With Oregon one of 12 states currently seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases, the state plans to draw from the vaccine bank quickly.

“Oregon will ask for the maximum allowed, which will help us to get shots in arms faster,” Gov. Kate Brown said May 4.

On April 27, Oregon’s infection rate had grown by 53% over the previous two weeks, the highest mark in the nation.

COVID-19 infections are still rising in Oregon, but more slowly.



Courtne McCauliffe/Contributed Photo

**Ruthie Mann, infection control officer at Wallowa Memorial Hospital, prepares a syringe with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday, March 9, 2021. In the background is Stacey Karvoski, WMH quality director and nurse.**

Cases have risen only 12% over the past two weeks. Oregon’s 33% increase in hospitalizations over the same time is the third highest in the nation, behind only Alaska and Kansas.

Nationwide, the infection rate is

down 26% in the past two weeks.

The strongest piece of positive news came at the end of April, when Oregon recorded its fewest COVID-19 deaths in a month since the beginning of the crisis in March 2020. Oregon currently

has the fifth-lowest death rate per 100,000 people in the United States. Alaska, Vermont, Hawaii and Idaho have lower rates.

Biden’s vaccination goal would require that 55 million people get their first shot by the end of the first week of June, just 3½ weeks from now.

The one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine could speed up the effort, but manufacturing issues and a review of safety concerns have slowed distribution to a trickle.

Just as there are states that eagerly desire the vaccine while others shun it, counties in Oregon show the same pattern.

Vaccination rates of residents 16 and older have varied widely across the 36 counties, from 64% in Benton and Hood River counties to less than 32% in Lake, Umatilla and Malheur counties.

That’s led to shifting more vaccine to areas where it is in demand, including Portland.

Oregon has the highest rate of “vaccine hesitancy” on the West Coast, with 15% of residents saying they are unsure or don’t want to get the shots, according to a report last week from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In contrast, California and Washington are reporting about 11% of the population is unsure or doesn’t want to be inoculated. California officials said the highest rates of negative response were in the northern tier of rural counties nearest the Oregon border.

Oregon has also dealt with what OHA Director Pat Allen has called “vaccine belligerency,” an active opposition to not only being inoculated, but at times protesting those who choose to get the vaccine. Incidents have included the heckling by antivaccination hardliners of Bend high school students at a school-sponsored clinic.

Other steps are being taken

to get more “impulse vaccinations” by offering shots without appointments. Many people across the country and in Oregon have expressed frustration with multiple, sometimes clunky websites required to make appointments. Now, it’s possible to just show up and roll up a sleeve.

Both federal and state health officials have said that they will also increasingly find ways to get vaccine to people instead of people to the vaccine. This will include mobile clinics, pop-up sites and vaccination days at major employers.

Over the entire pandemic that began in China on Dec. 31, 2019, Oregon has had the third-lowest per capita number of cases in the nation, at 4,432 per 100,000. Though the rise in infections has been sharp, Oregon’s longstanding place near the bottom of cases and deaths means that its per capita number of cases pushed it no higher than 12th place.

Oregon was among about a half dozen states with the lowest infection and death rates over the course of the pandemic. Just over 2,500 deaths were reported by Oregon out of the more than 575,000 deaths in the United States.

Biden said May 4 that he hoped the more people see the vaccine curbing COVID-19, the more he hopes they will change their minds and be inoculated, if not for themselves, then for family and friends.

“I think the end of the day, most people will be convinced by the fact that their failure to get the vaccine may cause other people to get sick and possibly die,” Biden said.

There is currently no vaccine approved for children. Pfizer announced it will ask for federal approval for emergency use of its vaccine on children as young as 2. The company told Wall Street analysts during an earnings call that the approval could come as early as this week.



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