

Everyone 16 and up eligible for vaccine at walk-in clinics April 27 through May 1

Pfizer vaccines will be given by OHA in the fairgrounds parking lot

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As the state opens up access to the COVID-19 vaccine for anyone 16 and older, the Oregon Health Authority will offer free shots to those interested at five walk-in clinics beginning April 27.

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said OHA would be administering the Pfizer vaccine at these clinics from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 27 and April 28, from noon to 7 p.m. April 29 and April 30 and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 1 in the parking lot at the Grant County Fairgrounds. No appointments are necessary for the free shots.

Lindsay said there are people in the county who have only wanted Pfizer, and so far, that has not been an option for them, or they've left the county to get it.

"For those that haven't received it and want it, here it is," she said.



EOMG file photo

Registered nurse LeAnn Alexander administers a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center CEO Lisa Guzman at the health clinic in Mission in December.

"And so I really hope that people take advantage of it."

She said the health department intends to get the vaccine out to other outlying communities in the future, but she does not know when the county will have access to the Pfizer vaccine again.

Lindsay said the Pfizer vaccine is a two-shot vaccine, with the second dose being administered approximately 28 days after the first. Someone is considered fully vaccinated 14 days

after they have had the second dose.

Johnson & Johnson vaccine

Lindsay said the Centers for Disease Control and Food and Drug Administration's decision to pause the Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccine amid reports of blood clots in women between the ages of 18 to 48 was "unfortunate." She said some people were willing to get the vaccine as long as they only had to do one shot. On the other hand, she said, some people were grateful that the government is taking it seriously and glad to understand better what's going on.

Lindsay said it's important to remember that much is not "mapped out" very well regarding the vaccines and COVID-19.

"We're writing the map as we as we go," she said. "And, people are upset and they're tired and they're wanting to point fingers. It's easy to point fingers at the things that you like, and you don't like and so I just think patience is key."

She told the Eagle that it's essential to remain thoughtful in making informed decisions.

"I am hopeful that the J&J issue will get resolved and be able to move

forward," she said.

Emails out to schools about vaccines

Lindsay said she sent out an email on Saturday to the schools in the county that are still in session to see if they might do something to get the word out about vaccine availability in the county. She said she hoped the schools could send out a flyer or an informational pamphlet or brochure about the vaccine. So far, Lindsay said, she had not heard back.

Cooperation with contact tracers

Lindsay said she estimated that roughly 40% of the people contacted by contact tracers did not answer their phones or call back. She said the state lent some of its contact tracers to assist the health department with the county's recent surge in cases. Lindsay said perhaps people did not pick up the calls because they were not from a local number, but she said the state left messages. She said the health department will be reaching out to those contacts this week.

"It is disheartening," she said. "And I feel for the people that are working

hard to be responsible."

Lindsay said that it impacts businesses when a county moves into "extreme risk" metrics. She said many like to tell one another not to get tested or go to the doctor when they get sick.

"That's the wrong message," she said. "The better message is to be preventative and proactive and get tested, and if you're sick, be responsible, and if you need to quarantine be considerate of the other people around you who are impacted."

Risk level

April 4-17, Grant County recorded 121 cases, at a rate of 1,644 per 100,000, the highest in the state and more than double the next highest rate, 592.5 in Klamath County.

Although Grant County's case count would have moved it from the low risk category to the highest level, extreme risk, the county will remain in the low risk category for two weeks because it moved down in risk level during the last movement week two weeks ago.

If case counts do not go down during the next two weeks, county businesses will face further restrictions in a higher risk level.

Oregon works to shrink vaccine disparity

By Suzanne Roig
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Health Authority will deploy vaccination vans to hard-to-reach communities as a way to eliminate the disparities created between those with easy access to COVID-19 vaccines and those facing barriers.

This comes at a time when daily case counts of COVID-19 have more than doubled in just over a month, Dr. Dean Sidelinger, Oregon Health Authority state epidemiologist, said Friday at a press conference.

As of Friday, Oregon had 173,626 COVID-19 cases, Sidelinger said. On March 6 the seven-day average number of cases was 249, but now the daily average is 595 cases.

COVID-19 cases have increased more than 20% for each of the past three weeks, Sidelinger said. With such high case counts, more counties have shifted from lower risk levels to more restrictive levels. At the end of March, 28 counties were in the lower to moderate risk tiers. On Friday there were 22 counties listed as lower or moderate risk.

"We're all tired of fighting COVID-19," Sidelinger said. "Tired of wearing our masks. Tired of missing our loved ones. And tired of keeping our distance. But we must all continue to fight."

Sidelinger highlighted three social gatherings that caused recent outbreaks: a multi-night karaoke event that caused 36 people to test positive, hospitalized three and left one person dead; a small indoor concert that caused 15 people to test positive for COVID-19; and a backyard gathering where all 10 people who attended tested positive for COVID-19.

Since December three in four seniors 65 and older

have been vaccinated. Starting Monday anyone 16 and older can sign up for a vaccination. In Central Oregon they can do that by going to centraloregon-covidvaccine.com. In Grant County they can email vaccine@ccsemail.com.

Oregon Health Authority data highlights a vaccine disparity between white Oregonians and Latinos in particular. About 75% of Oregonians are white, but white people account for 50% of COVID-19 cases and 71% of vaccinations. About 13% of Oregonians are Hispanic or Latino, but they make up 25% of COVID-19 cases account for 6% of vaccinations.

A driver in the vaccine disparity is that Latinos in Oregon tend to be younger and often don't work in the kinds of jobs that had early access to vaccines.

The state has sent additional vaccines to federally qualified health centers, targeted migrant workers and worked with 170 community partners, and still access hasn't been balanced, said Patrick Allen, Oregon Health Authority director, at a press conference Friday. Because it's not enough, vans will be sent out to rural communities to vaccinate those interested, Allen said.

"As a state we can and need to do better," Allen said. "Vaccinations in Oregon have not been administered as equitably as they need to be. The num-

bers are stark and clear. For too many people race and income are predictors of whether you can access a COVID-19 vaccine or not."

Vaccine disparity is a national issue that cannot rely upon just a speedy rollout of vaccine delivery systems such as through the Oregon Convention Center, the Salem fairgrounds or the Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center, although they play an important role, Allen said. The vans will enable the vaccines to get to communities directly.

As of Thursday, 1.5 million Oregonians received at least one dose of the vaccine. But because of concerns about rare clot clots, the state has halted the use of the one-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. Earlier in the week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged states to temporarily stop using the vaccine given to 6.8 million people after six women who received the vaccine became seriously ill and one died.

That halt means Oregon will have 70,000 fewer vaccines available each week, Allen said.

"We'll continue to see tight appointment availability in many parts of the state for the coming weeks at least until we know more about the availability of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine," Allen said. "However, we have enough doses to vaccinate anyone 16 and older before summer."

Oregon waiting for 'green light' after halting Johnson & Johnson vaccine

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon has "paused" using the Johnson & Johnson one-shot COVID-19 vaccine, even though none of six newly reported severe reactions to the vaccine occurred in the state, health officials said April 13.

The Centers for Disease Control urged states to temporarily stop using the vaccine given to 6.8 million people after six women who received the vaccine became seriously ill and one died.

"This appears to be extremely rare," Dr. Paul Cieslak, Oregon Health Authority's medical director for acute and communicable disease and immunizations, said during an afternoon press call.

The CDC said the six women were aged 18 to 48. They became ill from one to three weeks after their vaccination. The cause appeared to be a rare blood clot disorder.

The state has given about 82,000 Johnson & Johnson shots, a tiny fraction of the 2.3 million vaccine doses administered since December.

OHA said, as of April 12, 85,148 Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses have been administered in Oregon and 213,300 doses of the John-

son & Johnson vaccine have been delivered to about 225 vaccine sites statewide.

Cieslak said severe symptoms include pain in the legs — which could indicate a blood clot — severe headache and abdominal pain. Anyone experiencing the symptoms should contact their doctor or local public health agency. Information is also available by calling 211.

There have been no reports of any similar severe side effects to the Moderna and Pfizer two-shot vaccines.

Federal health officials will begin meeting Wednesday to look at the data on the severe cases and see if there is a direct connection between the vaccine and the illnesses.

Dr. Janet Woodcock, acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said Tuesday during a press conference in Washington, D.C., that a review of the vaccine would likely be "a matter of days."

Cieslak said the state would resume using the one-shot vaccine as soon as it gets "a green light" from federal officials.

The halt in using Johnson & Johnson vaccines will not change plans to open up vaccine eligibility to everyone age 16 and older on Monday. Availability has lagged

behind eligibility throughout the vaccination priority phases, and the same is expected to occur next week.

"People will have to wait a little longer" to get vaccinated, Cieslak said.

Oregon officials had already been bracing for a steep drop in available doses of the vaccine due to a botched batch of 15 million doses that had to be destroyed at a Baltimore facility.

Oregon received over 60,000 doses last week, but the breakdown in the supply chain due to the mishap in Baltimore reduced the flow to 8,000 this week and down to 2,000 next week.

OHA has estimated that up to 3.2 million Oregonians are 16 and older, the age group currently approved as safe to vaccinate. Several research efforts into a vaccine for children are underway, but none have been given federal approval.

Asked if the pause would fuel vaccine hesitancy among Oregonians, Cieslak said that those predisposed to not be vaccinated will likely latch on to the issue.

"There are some people who are going to decline vaccination regardless," he said. "If they were thinking vaccinations were harmful anyway, this will give them additional fuel."

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