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BOS Update
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It is hard to believe that autumn is officially upon us, and with fall's arrival this current and worst surge of COVID-19 is starting to ease. Our public health staff as well as health care providers across the county are greeting that news with guarded optimism as everyone will be happy to have less cases of COVID-19 and be able to catch our breath again. There is concern that this surge won't quite end the same way the others have and will continue to decline much more slowly than previous surges, possibly lasting well into next year. We may see mini-surges along the way back to very low levels of COVID-19 cases we had come to expect between the previous surges. Additionally, we are preparing for a flu season that might be worse than previous years given that there were extremely low number of flu cases last year in Humboldt County. Natural influenza immunity might have waned some during the pandemic due to the many pandemic precautions also severely limiting the impact of influenza.

Today's COVID-19 case rates have dropped to the lowest rate they've been in the past 2 months. However, case rates remain very high, higher than they were during the peak of the previous surges in winter and spring of this past year. Under the CDPH "Blueprint for a Safer Economy" we would continue to be assigned "Purple Tier." Based on CDC data tracker website, Humboldt County continues to be in the "Red, High Transmission" tier.

Hospitalizations were lower for the first 2 weeks of September but increased again and continue to be higher than previous surges even with these temporary decreases at the beginning of the month. Hospitalizations remain nearly double what they were at the peak of previous winter and spring surges. The average age for hospitalization in the Delta surge differs among fully vaccinated and unvaccinated groups (57 years of age average for unvaccinated hospitalizations, 74 years of age average for post-vaccine infection hospitalizations). This is also true of deaths based on vaccination status (65 years of age average for unvaccinated deaths, 74 years of age average for post-vaccine infection deaths). We will likely continue to see more hospitalizations and deaths over the coming weeks as those are the most lagging indicators for COVID-19 during a surge in cases. Based on current COVID-19 national modeling we could see cases, hospitalizations and deaths continue throughout the remainder of 2021, and into the spring of 2022.

Several factors are likely contributing to the projected slower decline in cases compared to previous surges. Loosening of restrictions on NPI (non-pharmaceutical interventions – masking, distancing, capacity reduction in public spaces, stay-at-home orders), and low vaccination uptake across the country compound the increased infectiousness of Delta variant. These factors lead to more virus circulating in our country than at any point prior, making COVID-19 virtually endemic. Looking at the CDC data tracker website this is notable in that over 95% of US counties are in the "Red, High Transmission" tier. There are not currently any suggestions that



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another variant of coronavirus is likely to replace the Delta variant. We will continue to monitor all data internationally and here in at home so we can alert the public to any changes should a new variant arise. We will continue to monitor overall local case data to inform any local policy changes. Humboldt County Public Health currently does not recommend any loosening of COVID-19 precautions due to cases/hospitalizations/deaths that all continue to be higher than they were throughout most of the pandemic.

Vaccines continue to perform well and protect the public from COVID-19 disease. Communities with higher vaccination rates have seen less hospital and death burden during the Delta surge. Our local vaccination rates have showed slow but steady rise for the past few months with around 1% increase each week in those fully vaccinated. We saw higher uptake of vaccine in the first few weeks of August with the arrival of Delta variant and several vaccine mandates. The county continues to retain the services of Snap Nurse mobile vaccination team who will stay in Humboldt County until the end of the year in an effort to increase local vaccination rates. This team is working 5-6 days a week and going to 1-3 sites each day they are working. This team also now offers rapid and PCR testing at all vaccine events.

We expect all COVID-19 vaccine providers to become busier in the coming weeks with expected expansion of additional shots for all three vaccines as well as expected approval for the 5–11-year-old ages. CDPH has endorsed the expansion of 3rd doses for Pfizer based on CDC recommendations. A 3rd booster shot of Pfizer should be given to everyone 6 months after their 2nd dose for those age 65+, those age 18+ who live in high-risk long-term care facilities, as well as those 50-64 with certain medical conditions. These priority groups should get their 3rd doses of Pfizer right away if eligible. Other groups were also approved that may get Pfizer booster shots 6 months after becoming fully vaccinated based on age 18-49 with underlying medical conditions or with occupational risks (healthcare, teachers, grocery, jail, homeless, and more). These [CDC recommendations](#) are currently in place across Humboldt County, and all COVID-19 vaccination sites should be following this CDC approved expansion of Pfizer shots. Those who are immunocompromised should follow [previous CDC recommendation](#) for a 3rd shot of either Moderna or Pfizer 28 days after their 2nd dose.

We are working with local COVID-19 vaccine providers and our public health vaccination team to ensure adequate appointments are available for currently approved boosters and any future COVID-19 vaccine approvals. No mass vaccination events are planned at this time as the current infrastructure seems adequate to handle the demand. We will work closely with local partners to coordinate resources, and with the state and federal levels to implement mass vaccination if the demand is overwhelming the local COVID-19 vaccine infrastructure.

Schools have been in session for over 1 month now and while we continue to find cases in the schools, Humboldt County Public Health has followed only 1 case of an in-school outbreak in a classroom so far. We are working closely with all schools to reduce the risk daily to students through masking, distancing whenever possible, testing frequently, enhancing ventilation, and



having as many protocols in place as possible to keep kids safe and keep them in school. Statewide data shows that in the school ages there was no increase in COVID-19 cases associated with start of K-12 school year, further supporting that schools are safe, and we are not seeing COVID-19 widespread transmission within the classrooms. We continue to work with schools on getting COVID-19 vaccines to as many school aged children and staff who willing to be vaccinated. Vaccination continues to be the number one factor in protecting a classroom, just as it is everywhere else. The higher percentage of persons who are vaccinated in any setting, including a classroom, the safer that classroom and closer they will get to full reopening with less COVID precautions.

The pandemic has continued to take a toll on everyone in our community in one way or another. Many have lost not only health and life, but income and security. We have seen the pandemic tear through our medical system as well as tear at the very fabric of our society. As we continue to learn to live with COVID-19, we need to find ways to heal not only from the viral infections of COVID-19, but from the long-lasting societal divisions that these infections have created in all aspects of our lives in business, government, family, and friends.

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