

44% of RI Fully Vaccinated: A summary of the governor's weekly COVID-19 press conference



State leaders gave the weekly COVID press conference today, updating Rhode Islanders on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and local government response.

Numbers continue to drop as the state's vaccine campaign ramps up. "We're in a really good place right now," said Dr Philip Chan, filling in today for DoH director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott. DoH reports 264 cases since yesterday, with a percent positive in tests of 1.4%, the lowest since the week of October 11, before this past winter's second surge. Fatalities and hospitalization rates have dropped significantly for at-risk groups locally. There are 150 people hospitalized as of today; 32 people are in the intensive care unit and 20 people are on ventilators. State leaders have also reported one additional death since yesterday. Daily deaths overall have hovered in the mid-to-low single digits since early February.

Two-thirds of eligible Rhode Islanders have received at least one vaccine dose as of today, with 44% now considered fully vaccinated. State leaders today also announced that last week, more vaccines were administered than any week since the start of the campaign. COVID vax czar Tom McCarthy stated the state was now transitioning quickly into phase three of vaccine operations, with the intended goal of meeting people where they are. The governor announced they were partnering with local businesses, universities, schools and others to bring vaccine events and get the word out.

Appointments for vaccinations will also not be required at retail pharmacies, McKee announced today. Walk-up, same-day appointments will be available at participating retail pharmacies like CVS, Walgreens, Walmart and Stop and Shop as supply allows. This is a big expansion after the state tried walk-up appointments at state sites in the Dunkin Donuts Center and Sockanosset.

Governor McKee had only a few new announcements today. The CDC updated its guidance earlier this week to loosen some mask-wearing recommendations for fully vaccinated people. Rhode Island health officials revised state guidance to align with the CDC effective tomorrow, April 30. Mask wearing will be required indoors, but only recommended outdoors in big crowds for folks who are fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated in Rhode Island terms means two weeks after receiving your final shot, whether it's a second shot for Pfizer/Moderna vaccines or the single Johnson and Johnson. J&J vaccines are also back in the rotation. CDC and FDAs gave the green light for the single shot vaccine to start being administered again after a temporary pause from reports of six cases of extremely rare blood clotting disorders in certain patients. Rhode Island public health leaders today emphasized the vaccine is safe, and urged citizens to bring any concerns to their health care provider.

State leaders announced today that Rhode Island state beaches would be open at full capacity this summer, with masks not required for fully vaccinated residents except in congregate settings such as concession stands. Rhode Islanders can expect Roger Wheeler State Beach, Scarborough State Beach and Third Beach to open on May 15. All other state beaches will be fully opened starting Memorial Day weekend. "It's not a Rhode island summer without Rhode Island beaches," said McKee.

The governor today also stressed the need for Rhode Islanders to get back to work, citing concerns from local businesses that allege a labor shortage in certain precarious industries like food service. The governor, with partners in the state legislature, has introduced legislation that would enable people to work some hours and still "keep connected" to the unemployment insurance system. Toward the end of next month, McKee said they would start enforcing work search requirements for those on unemployment. "It's time to get Rhode Islanders back to work safely," said the governor.

Schools can expect to reopen fully in the fall, Commissioner Green announced today. Most schools across the state are back learning in person, after a robust campaign to get educators vaccinated. State education leaders will also be announcing in the future free summer programs for students statewide. The state is also starting a vaccine campaign in high schools to get of-age students and their families vaccinated. The state is running vaccination clinics at schools across the state if the municipality and district asks, and in the next week will be at schools in North Kingstown, Cranston, Cumberland ("Go Clippers!" chimed the governor) and others to come.