

COVID Numbers Declining: A summary of the governor's weekly press conference



Photo Credit: Small Frye Photography

Governor Dan McKee and other public health leaders gave the weekly COVID-19 response briefing today.

Rhode Island's COVID numbers continue to be on the decline. There have been 200 new cases of the coronavirus since yesterday, for a percent positive test rate of 1.1%. The weekly average has declined to 1.6%. There are 118 people hospitalized for reasons related to the virus. The weekly average for new hospital admissions is 112, down from 134 just last week. Twenty-three people are in the intensive care unit, and 16 people are on ventilators.

"Things continue to get better, I remain cautiously optimistic," said DoH's Dr. Philip Chan. The B117 variant continues to be the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the Ocean State with public health leaders estimating it causes about 50% of current infections. Ninety percent of teachers in the state are vaccinated, and as a result, infections among educators have declined. Rates of COVID-19 among children are going up, mirroring national trends. A vaccine safe for under-16s is not expected to be consumer ready for many months.

Around 95/96% of people getting the first dose of a Moderna or Pfizer vaccine are returning for their second shots, COVID response director Tom McCarthy told *Motif* today. More than 581,000 people are at least partially vaccinated, not counting those who live out of state. There are 428,823 people considered fully vaccinated, which the state counts as two weeks from the final dose of any of the three vaccines currently available.

Two of the state's vaccine sites have performed 2,500 walk up appointments of the vaccine, with the state still working on at-home vaccine shots for residents older than 75 who have not received the vaccine. Approximately 280,000 people are left in the total eligibility pool, 13,500 of them are over the age of 75. "We have an ample supply of vaccines," said Dr. Chan.

The first round of COVID restrictions are scheduled to be lifted starting tomorrow. Here are the highlights:

- Mask wearing is still required indoors in public areas, but not outdoors if you are vaccinated and can socially distance at least three feet from others.
- The social gathering limit is being raised to 25 for indoors and up to 75 people outdoors.
- Restaurants, venues, houses of worship, fitness centers and other businesses will see capacity limits lifted to 80% indoors with three feet of spacing, and 100% outdoors.
- You can also start sitting at bars again without ordering food, but plexiglass is still required.
- Catered events can have up to 250 guests indoors and 500 guests outdoors with rapid on-site COVID testing still recommended. Standing service will only be allowed outside.

These loosened restrictions will remain in place until May 28, when many of them will be lifted. In other news, Gov. McKee announced today the state will reinstate and enforce work search requirements for people on unemployment starting May 23. State officials had previously waived the requirement for duration of the pandemic.

Finally as the state reopens itself for business later this month, Gov McKee hinted that the state may seek a change of venue. For most of the pandemic, the state has hosted reporters at The Vets giving live updates, but McKee said today it may change soon to the State House, another sign of state leaders' confidence in the handling of the pandemic.