

# **DoH Director Defends Vaccine Rollout: A summary of the weekly COVID-19 press conference**

DOH director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Commerce Sec. Stefan Pryor, and Maj. Gen. Chris Callahan of the RI National Guard gave the weekly COVID press conference today at 1pm. Conspicuously, neither Gov. Gina Raimondo nor governor-in-waiting Dan McKee were in attendance.

DOH officials reported 320 new cases of COVID-19 since yesterday, out of 17,924 tests. The test positive rate has plummeted to 1.8%, compared to being in the double digits before the pause started last year. There are 180 people hospitalized with the virus, 32 are in intensive care and 18 are on ventilators. DOH reports 119,284 people have received the first dose of the vaccine, with 54,350 having received the second dose and count as fully vaccinated. The state has used 173,634 doses of the vaccine supply since vaccinations started in December.

Starting tomorrow, hospitals, nursing homes and congregate care settings can begin resuming visitations as long as they have not had a positive coronavirus case within the last two weeks. Regular COVID guidance, such as hand-washing, social distancing and mask-wearing, remain in place. Existing guidance for visitation at these facilities had been very strict, often only allowing for caregivers and family members to visit during end of life care.

“Rhode Island continues to be in a very good place when it comes to our COVID-19 response,” said Dr. Alexander-Scott. While the state’s vaccine rollout has proven controversial when compared to how other states rank, Dr. Alexander-Scott credited DOH’s targeted approach as essential to protecting the Ocean State’s vulnerable populations and maintaining equity in distribution. According to data provided by state health officials, hospitalizations have been reduced by 46% due to vaccinations and other measures mandated by the state. Neighboring Connecticut and Massachusetts have only been able to reduce hospitalizations in 2021 by 10% and 32% respectively. The national average on hospitalizations is a reduction by 32%.

Dr. Alexander-Scott defended the state’s vaccination rollout, saying, “We’ve seen the majority of our fatalities, close to 70% of our COVID-19 fatalities have been from our congregate care settings.” She continued to state that health leaders have achieved many of the goals in phase one of the vaccination plan. The state is beginning phase two, with vaccination appointments opening to people between the ages of 65 and 74 and other similar high risk groups.

The two state-run vaccination sites opened this morning, and according to Dr. Alexander-Scott, more than 10,000 appointments have been made, with even more getting the vaccine through CVS or Walgreens retail locations. Dr. Alexander-Scott today said the state would continue to expand more state-run vaccination sites across the state. DOH officials envision replacing the sites run by municipalities with five regional sites run by local governments. "This our model: more shots at fewer and more central locations," said Dr. Alexander-Scott.

*Rhode Islanders over the age of 65 can sign up for a vaccine starting next week. Interested citizens should go to [vaccinateri.org](http://vaccinateri.org) or call 844-930-1779.*