

# **New Flexibility in Business Restrictions Announced: A summary of the weekly COVID-19 press conference**

Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, commerce director Stefan Pryor and incoming governor Dan McKee gave the weekly press conference today at 1pm.

“It’s exactly the direction we want to continue to go,” said Dr. Alexander-Scott about today’s data. DoH announced that COVID-19 data continues to trend down. There were 416 new cases since yesterday for a 2.1% test positive rate; 238 people remain hospitalized with the virus, half of what the numbers were in December according to state leaders. Forty-five people are in the ICU, 20 are on ventilators and there were 15 additional deaths today according to DoH. Additionally, state leaders today highlighted a drop-off in cases among healthcare workers. Cases peaked around Christmastime at 403 new cases among healthcare workers per week.

Commerce Secretary Pryor announced “new flexibility” with business restrictions starting tomorrow. There were two major changes in venues of assembly (including churches and houses of worship) and bar areas. Venues, starting tomorrow, will be limited to 40% of their total capacity, with 6 foot spacing for a capped total of 125 people. Bar areas, formerly closed, can have a max of four people from two separate households per party. They need a minimum of 6 feet of spacing or 3 feet with barriers. Bar customers will be capped at 90 minutes per visit, and bars must close at 11pm. All other business guidance remains the same.

Pryor stated that Rhode Island would be “the leading edge” in establishing these rules for bars. No other state in the region has reopened bar areas or set similar guidance for the future.

These new flexible rules go hand in hand with Dr. Alexander-Scott’s announcement that the social gathering limit would also be increased. These limits will expand to two households indoors and three households if outdoors. “Think about those two households as two exclusive units together,” said Dr. Alexander-Scott.

Rhode Island has given 93,489 people the first vaccine dose, for a total of 133,844 doses administered overall; 40,355 people have received the second dose and are fully vaccinated. State leaders also announced today that the Dunk would become a state-run vaccination center starting next Thursday, with a second location at Sockanosset being made ready for opening as well. The Dunk location will vaccinate 500 people a day, and Sockanosset will vaccinate 900 per day to start. Vaccination appointments will be made available to Rhode Islanders over the age of 75. A website will go live on Wednesday as well as a phone line to schedule appointments at these two locations.

Going forward, Rhode Islanders will be able to access vaccinations through three different types of sites: state-run sites, such as the Dunk and Sockanosset, retail pharmacy locations, such as CVS and Walgreens, and regional vaccination sites run through local clinics. CVS and Walgreens are receiving 7,000 doses of the vaccine for people over the age of 75, with CVS getting at least 3,000 doses straight from the federal government.