Yakima Health District

Media Release

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Contact: Stephanie Badillo-Sanchez, Communications Specialist   509-941-7364

Community Members Urged to Take Immediate Action as COVID-19 Cases and Hospitalizations Increase

Yakima, WA- Yakima County has seen an alarming increase in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19. From June 1 to August 17 the case rate increased from 120 to 508 per 100,000 the hospitalization rate increased from 2.7 to 7.0 per 100,000 and 23 community members have died due to COVID-19. This fourth wave of COVID-19 in Yakima County has been the most startling yet, with the increase in activity showing no sign of slowing and the increase being much faster than previous waves. Much of this has to do with the fact that the most dominant strain of COVID-19, Delta, is more than two times as contagious as previous variants.

All the healthcare systems in Yakima County, Washington State, and the region have voiced their concerns about their capacity to be able to adequately provide care to their patients given the strain they are under. This increase in COVID-19 activity is causing hospitals to lose already limited space for other emergency procedures. Many providers, who have been working through the pandemic over the last 18 months are also reporting that they are burned out and tired.

As of August 19, 2021, Yakima County logged a rate of 622 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000. This is one of the highest rates of new infection across the state of Washington. Counties with the lowest vaccination rates tend to have the highest rate of infection as there are more individuals with which the virus can spread. For context, earlier in the year when restrictions were still in place for businesses, the threshold to reopen was 200 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000. The current rate is more than double and will likely double again in the next few weeks if community members do not take immediate action.

Given previous trends in Yakima County, for every 100 people infected with COVID-19, it is likely that 5 of those individuals may be hospitalized and 1 of those individuals may die due to COVID-19. The other 94 individuals may experience mild to moderate symptoms, but those mild to moderate symptoms may still likely cause them to miss work, school, and other activities. This amount of illness will surely have an impact on the workplace if there are outbreaks, and on the schools if kids need to quarantine at home or their teachers need to isolate.

Governor Inslee announced a statewide mask mandate for indoor public spaces that will include everyone, regardless of their vaccination status that is scheduled to take effect on Monday, August 23. Additionally, the Department of Health is recommending everyone wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings, like concerts and fairs. With summer coming to an end, there are various events and festivities taking place. If individuals plan to go to a large event, the Yakima Health District is urging extreme caution given the high risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community.

The Yakima Health District recommends:

1. Get vaccinated as soon as possible. If you are one of the immunocompromised individuals, you are now eligible to receive a third booster dose from any vaccine provider.

2. Wear a mask and ensure at least 6 feet of space between yourself and other individuals when indoors or when in outdoor crowded settings.
3. Monitor for symptoms and get tested immediately if COVID-19 is suspected.
4. Sign-up for WA Notify to help alert others you have been around that they have been exposed to COVID-19.

Quotes:

"If you've been waiting to get the vaccine, now is the time to protect yourself through vaccination. This virus, in just four short weeks, has quickly changed the trajectory of our community's health and safety. Community members must understand that we are not living in the same environment we were on July 1st. This new wave of disease is unlike anything we've seen up until this point, and short of quick and immediate action, we are poised to see an incredible amount of sickness and preventable death due to COVID-19 and its subsequent impacts on our healthcare system." -Andre Fresco, Executive Director, Yakima Health District

"We are asking community members to realize that their actions, while personal in nature, will ultimately have repercussions to our community. The more we let this disease run rampant, the more we are choosing to put our children's education at risk, our businesses at risk, and our lives from being able to move on. If we had enough vaccinations completed, we could have been well on our way to overcoming this pandemic two months ago, when we were at some of our lowest rates since the pandemic began." -Dr. Neil Barg, Health Officer, Yakima Health District

"If you are undecided about getting vaccinated, I encourage you to get the information you need from your doctor or health district. Numerous studies have shown that the vaccines are safe and effective, and real-life data shows us that individuals most impacted by COVID-19 are those who are unvaccinated. If you choose not to get the vaccine, then, at a minimum, wear a mask whenever in public and ensure at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others." -Melissa Sixberry, Director of Disease Control, Yakima Health District

"The positivity rate in Yakima County is now over 30% — the highest rate we have seen during the entire pandemic. This is extremely concerning," -Dr. Tanny Davenport, Memorial's Physician Executive for the Medical Group

"We are facing another wave of infections throughout our county. The vast majority of these patients being treated are unvaccinated and we are seeing younger and younger patients suffering complications and needing acute medical care. Our current hospital COVID admissions are unvaccinated. With the increase of COVID patients in our systems, we are also seeing an increase of wait times in our emergency departments, an increased need for inpatient beds, and challenges with transferring patients who are needing higher level of care or specialized care. The community can help our healthcare workers and our healthcare system by getting vaccinated. Vaccines are safe and encouraged by our healthcare community." -Rhonda Wellner BSN RN, System Director of Quality, Astria Health

Additional Information
www.YakimaVaccines.org
www.YakimaTesting.org

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