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BOS Update 9/9/21

The current surge in cases related to Delta variant has not yet abated in Humboldt County. We have seen signs locally of a plateau for a few weeks with stabilizing overall case rates of COVID-19. Statewide there is a downward trend in both cases and test positivity, which is a signal that for the rest of the state this surge is likely ending. That sign of decline is not strong enough locally to make the call that the surge is ending in our county yet. Generally, in past surges of COVID-19 cases, and based on experience nationally and statewide, hospitalizations and deaths peak about 2-4 weeks after the peak of cases. Given this previous experience we at Humboldt County Public Health expect to continue to see hospital impacts locally at least through the end of September, possibly longer.

Our local hospitals have been struggling under the intense pressure of taking care of large numbers of COVID-19 patients. Countywide COVID-19 hospitalizations have topped out around 40 patients in the hospitals per day, with the majority of those at Saint Joseph's hospital in Eureka (25-35 per day). The average ICU stay for a COVID-19 patient is upwards of 19 days. The amount of hands-on physical care involved in a COVID-19 ICU patient is incredible. Nursing teams are turning these paralyzed patients several times a day, managing ventilators, multiple intravenous lines, managing monitors, all while patients are in an induced coma to prevent from hurting themselves and allow for adequate care given these various intensive medical requirements, and maintaining strict protective equipment to prevent infection. We are seeing increasing numbers of hospital workers with traumatic experiences similar to those who work in war zones. We have seen the age of the unvaccinated COVID-19 patient decrease in the past months to be much younger than seen previously, with most unvaccinated COVID-19 patients being in their 50s or younger. Fully vaccinated COVID-19 patients are typically in 70s or older with multiple medical conditions.

Due to the immense physical and emotional toll on the healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients, we have seen unprecedented numbers of workers leaving the workforce locally. While our local hospitals have attempted to fill these roles with travelling healthcare workers from agencies supplied by our state partners at CDPH, the needs have not always been met due to demand from surrounding counties and states with even greater needs. Even these emergency staffing agencies are seeing the effects of those leaving the workforce and are struggling to fulfill their obligations to staff for these ongoing emergencies spread out across our entire country.

Our local healthcare partners at Saint Joseph's hospital in Eureka have recently undertaken opening a clinic for monoclonal antibody treatments. This clinic allows for treatment of both positive patients with known risk factors for progression to severe disease, as well as future expansion to provide prophylaxis for those patients with the same risk factors who were exposed to COVID-19 but are not yet positive. Monoclonal antibodies can also be given to those who are at higher risk of hospitalization and are fully vaccinated. The state is currently working with



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SJH-Eureka to help staff this clinic and open it up more broadly to everyone in the community without a physician referral. Once the transition to state oversight is fully operational, in the future this clinic will allow for anyone to get treatment without a physician referral.

Our local schools are in full session, as they are across the state, and we are not seeing rates of COVID-19 go up because of school reopening. This local trend is also true statewide, where many schools have been open for weeks without increases in cases. While we expect to see background transmission in the community that we will find due to enhanced screening and testing in the schools, we are not seeing signs that COVID-19 is spreading in schools where masking is required of everyone, including those who are fully vaccinated. Multiple studies have shown that in school where strict masking occurred, even without distancing, COVID-19 transmission was lower or at the background rate seen in the community. This means that in student settings where masking is occurring, even without distancing, that COVID-19 should not be spreading. In addition, schools are encouraged to offer more layers of protection by encouraging vaccination, using as much distancing as is physically possible given their space constraints, masking in outdoor settings, offering testing, enhancing ventilation, and working with public health to identify outbreaks that may be occurring within the school setting.

Background transmission in the community is very high currently which is the reason for our current masking order that continues to require masking of all individuals regardless of vaccination status in both indoor and outdoor crowded public places. We strongly encourage all members of our community who are unvaccinated and eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to seek out vaccination immediately as it is the best tool to protect themselves, their family, and our community as a whole. We continue to see slow but steady progress in the vaccination effort, with about 1% of the community becoming newly vaccinated each week. Those who are unvaccinated are encouraged to avoid larger public gatherings where risk may be even higher, especially if those gatherings are largely unmasked and among the unvaccinated. The risk of gatherings to unvaccinated person who have risk factors for COVID-19 severe disease is particularly high. These risks include age over 65, obesity, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, pregnancy, or being a part of a racial or ethnic group who is at higher risk for progression to severe COVID-19.

At Humboldt County Public Health, we want to recognize that we are all struggling to learn to live with COVID-19 as a new reality of our community that will not be going away any time soon. We will continue to focus our resources on places where we will be able to reduce the impact of COVID-19 over time through ongoing risk reduction at population levels through vaccination, masking, distancing, better ventilation, and encouraging those who are at highest risk and are unvaccinated to avoid uncontrolled gatherings where they might become exposed to COVID-19. We are all part of this public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we appreciate all that the community is doing to reduce the risk for themselves, their family, and their neighbors.

