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Transcript: Governor Phil Scott Discusses Latest Covid-19 Trends at Weekly Press Conference

21 September 2021

Montpelier, Vt. – At his weekly press conference, Governor Phil Scott today delivered the following remarks.

[Click here to view the full press conference](#), including additional remarks from Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD, Education Secretary Dan French, Human Services Secretary Mike Smith, and the state's [weekly data and modeling presentation](#) from Financial Regulation Commissioner Michael Pieciak.

To find out where to get a free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine today, visit healthvermont.gov/myvaccine.

Transcript of Governor Scott's remarks:

Good afternoon. As you heard late last week, a technical glitch with an IT vendor delayed some case reporting for the days of September 9 through September 17. That issue has been resolved but some cases that should have been reported earlier were delayed and were instead reported throughout last week. So that does make our day-to-day case outlook a little murky, as you will hear from Commissioner Pieciak in a few minutes.

Regardless, we know we have had case counts in the 100s to 200s over the last week and our hospitalizations have ticked up slightly. However – and this is important because I've seen some misunderstanding here – hospitalizations are still below our peak. I went back to my notes and confirmed we had days in February where we were in the mid-60s.

What we also know is these upticks are being driven more and more by the unvaccinated, which account for about 80% of hospitalizations and 84% of those in the ICU. For example, yesterday, of the 47 in the hospital, 46 were adults and 35 of those adults are eligible to be vaccinated but are not.

We also see the gap between the vaccinated and unvaccinated widening when it comes to cases. And in recent weeks, around 75% of cases are among those age 18 and over.

As has been said before and I'll say it again, this is now a pandemic of the unvaccinated – primarily unvaccinated adults who are eligible, and it is adults who are at the most risk of severe outcomes.

So, the most important step we can take as a state is to get as many Vermonters vaccinated as possible.

And if you're still on the fence or just haven't found the time, please look at this data and do some soul searching. Because vaccines are safe and effective and they're the absolute best path – not just for yourself but for your family and friends and the rest of us – so we don't move backwards or need new restrictions.

Now, I know there are some who would like to see more restrictions put in place, which I'll remind you, would require a State of Emergency.

I'll also remind you that broad restrictions had harmful impacts in other areas like people not addressing their healthcare needs, isolation of older family members, remote learning and business closures that put people out of work.

And I would like to make clear what we are doing right now:

As our data shows, the vaccine is the best tool we have in the toolbox and is a gamechanger. From the beginning, we took quick action to vaccinate as many Vermonters as possible and, as a result, we have the most fully vaccinated population in the country at 78.1%. And 87.4% of those eligible have started vaccination.

And we aren't done yet.

To set an example and in hopes of encouraging more to get vaccinated, we've implemented a policy effective this week that all state employees must either be vaccinated or wear a mask and test. Remember, we have about 8,000 state employees. I also continue to urge employers and schools to adopt a similar policy while we await more details on the President's proposal for vaccine requirements.

On masking, we also have some measures in place.

First, every school but one has a masking requirement, which means we effectively have a mask mandate in schools.

Next, as we've discussed many times, if you are not vaccinated, you should absolutely wear a mask when indoors with people from outside your household. And you should think about other protective measures like avoiding crowds and getting tested. And, as the Health Department has recommended, while we are still seeing this Delta wave, vaccinated Vermonters should wear a mask when in crowded indoor settings.

We also continue to offer a lot of testing options, and while I know some are seeing delays – which we're working on – the fact is we are still among the top five states in testing and are frequently at the very top. And we're always looking for ways to make this process better and faster.

Now, I understand these are not state mandates, but they are actions that have an impact.

Again, for broad mandates I'd need to declare a state of emergency and the data still doesn't support that step. What's more, I do not think it is the right approach and my team has not recommended it.

We are not in the same place we were six months ago, and neither are Vermonters, who have been re-evaluating their risks because of the vaccine.

And we simply cannot be in a perpetual State of Emergency. It sets a dangerous precedent and would be an abuse of my authority, given that vaccines are proving to be so effective in protecting people.

The fact is COVID-19, like the flu, is here to stay. So, we need to use the tools we have and what we've learned to help people make smart decisions at the individual level.

Things like staying home when sick and getting tested if you think you could have been exposed, especially if you are planning to visit someone who is vulnerable, like an older relative or someone with a severe illness.

It also includes understanding who the most vulnerable are; who is actually at risk of having a severe case; and also how vaccines are significantly reducing risk – because they are.

For example, I know some continue to *only* look at case counts. And I get it. For many months before vaccines, cases were all we talked about. It was the most effective way to communicate the risk of hospitalizations, long term care outbreaks and deaths. But now, with vaccines, those rates are decreasing, which means risks are changing.

It's clear we need to show how its changing so Vermonters have more information and can continue to do their part to protect those who are most vulnerable and make smart choices.

So, our team is currently looking to compare key pre-vaccine data points to our current situation to help Vermonters see how things are actually improving, even with Delta, because of the vaccines. And over the next several weeks, we will be sharing what we find with you.

Knowing this has always been a virus that most often harms senior citizens with underlying conditions and had a big impact on our long-term care facilities, we'll be starting with a look at how outbreaks and outcomes have changed there, which Dr. Levine has discussed at these briefings in recent weeks.

While this is data we've looked at throughout the pandemic, our focus is on better comparing what we see today to what we saw before we had the protection of vaccines.

After we present the long-term care data we'll present other updates, including more details on declining hospitalization and fatality rates, some more information on factors and conditions that make people vulnerable, and other useful information.

In the meantime, please get vaccinated, watch the health department guidance, and pay attention to what you are doing so we can get through this Delta wave and continue to move forward.

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