

“100 days of relative misery.” That is how Dr. Patrick Luedtke, Lane County senior Public Health Officer, described the next several weeks in Lane County. Even though we have seen two vaccines released, he said the county, and the state, are in the steep part of the curve and will be until spring. To date, over 8,000 Lane County residents have been diagnosed with COVID19. Dr. Luedtke says that data suggests that four of every five infected by the virus are either asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic, suggesting that there are actually over 40,000 infected individuals today in a county with population over 300,000.



These numbers are actually good news, he suggested, noting that had county residents not been so careful to follow guidelines on mask wearing and social distancing, the situation could be much worse. He added that while during the warmer summer months there was probably only a one in 50 chance of being infected without taking precautions, now that we are indoors during the winter months that risk rises to one in two.

Caseloads are apparently growing much more rapidly than vaccinations. Now cases are going up by 1,000 every thirteen days. So far vaccinations are running a few hundred each week, although he expects we might get as many as 5,000 doses in the next week. There is still a shortage in supply, although he says that a third vaccine may release the results of its stage three trials (the last stage before a vaccine may be given emergency approval) as early as next week. A fourth vaccine is also nearing the end of stage three trials and may be available in a few weeks.

DR. Luedtke cautioned that the increase in number of vaccinations should not cause the public to relax following the mask and social distancing restrictions. He said the vaccines that have been and will be approved have been shown to be 95 percent effective against preventing COVID 19 disease (a rate that is vastly better than for other vaccines such as that for whooping cough). Even so, the vaccines have NOT been tested for the ability to prevent infection, meaning that science cannot yet know whether vaccinated individuals can still transmit the disease to others. Dr. Luedtke said it may well be the fall before the goal of 300,000 vaccinations in Lane County can be achieved. He urged anyone who is vaccinated to sign up for the VSafe program, an application which runs on any cell phone that will make it possible to track vaccinated individuals and see if they still contribute to the growth in the number of infections. Vaccinated individuals can get information on how to sign up for the program [HERE](#).

The Governor’s new guidance which places teachers at the front of the line for vaccination was the topic of several questions. Dr. Luedtke said the changes followed on several rounds of discussion by a panel of providers on the ethical questions of how to distribute the vaccine most effectively and equitably. He does not expect further changes, and he noted that being in a priority group and getting a vaccination are not coextensive since there remains such a limited supply. While seniors by age group are in the priority list for vaccination starting February 8 for those over 80, that is dependent on vaccines being available.

Dr. Luedtke pointed out that typically an adult begins to lose one percent of lung function every year after age 25. These means that aging populations are increasingly vulnerable to serious consequences if they become infected.

There still is come lack of clarity on eligibility for vaccination. It is not clear whether higher education teachers are included in the priority group, although Dr. Luedtke suspects they are. Similarly, it is not clear whether non-teaching staff in education settings are in the same priority as teachers. Dr. Luedtke did say that at present the University of Oregon is not receiving a separate vaccine allocation so they will fit in as appropriate with other Lane County residents. A question was raised about singling out multi-generational households, to which Dr. Luedtke said he would pursue that topic in future discussion with the Oregon Health Authority.

DR. Luedtke urged listeners to keep in contact with their primary care providers to stay up to date on when they might be able to receive a vaccine. For those who do not have a primary care provider, he urged them to follow developments on the [Lane County Public Health web page](#) or, if they have no internet access, to keep in touch with safety net provides like White Bird clinic.

For now, efforts with the unhoused population have focused on infection control to reduce the chances of infection. As more vaccine becomes available, those individuals will be included in appropriate groups to receive the shots.

Finally, Dr. Luedtke reminded the audience that vaccines are not interchangeable. He said that for now, given the limited supply individuals will not have an opportunity to select which vaccine they get and when a second shot is required it must be of the same vaccine as the first shot.