

Public Health Weekly Statement

January 19, 2021

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Currently, pandemic risk indicators are following a pattern that we refer to as a “squiggly curve” – meaning that both positivity and case rates are remaining in a low up and down pattern. This is true across the state, region and counties. Hospitals are reporting lower inpatient numbers of patients with COVID-19 and health departments are more easily managing case investigations and contact tracing. Lower levels of testing are being reported across the state and all of this creates a picture of risk that may be lurking under the surface. A new variant of the virus has now been identified in Michigan and although this is not unusual and was anticipated, it reminds us of the need to continue to be careful. The new variant is expected to be more transmissible than the current – meaning it is likely that every one person with the virus will infect 3 people instead of two. Because it is more transmissible, it is expected that it will overtake the current variation quickly and be the most predominant variation by spring. There is no current evidence that indicates it will be less amenable to treatment or to vaccine effectiveness which is encouraging. However, it is critical that we continue to take the necessary steps to reduce transmission including testing, isolation, quarantine, and mitigation measures such as masking, social distancing and avoiding large gatherings.

It is clear that many people in our communities are excited about receiving the vaccine! This is a welcome sentiment however, currently a source of frustration is that supply cannot keep up with demand. There are two brands of COVID-19 vaccine that are currently approved and in circulation – one made by Pfizer and the other by Moderna. They have been shown in clinical trials to be equal in both efficacy and safety profile. Hundreds of thousands of doses have been administered with very few complications reported so far. The mRNA technology is promising in its ability to be rapidly produced and changed when necessary and is a source of hope not only in reaching the end of the pandemic but also for future vaccines and treatments for diseases such as cancer. The manufacturers are making more doses every day however, it is important to remember that these vaccines are being rolled out simultaneously across the entire world! This has been a long and difficult journey and we are all understandably anxious to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

It is important to note that each week the state of Michigan receives a federal allocation of doses of both vaccines. The Moderna vaccine is being sourced to the pharmacies carrying out the vaccination of residents and staff in long term care and similar facilities. The Pfizer vaccine is being supplied mainly to hospitals and local health departments but weekly allocations to the state of 60,000 are quickly overtaken by local requests that exceed 250,000 – 300,000. Unfortunately, although we have been allowed to place orders for what we anticipate we can use, the actual doses received have been somewhat unpredictable. The good news is that we have quickly built local capacity through partnership with hospitals, FQHC's, volunteers, community agencies, and the National Guard and we stand ready to vaccinate quickly with whatever allocations we receive! By the end of this week we will have administered just over 3,000 doses in the Health Department of Northwest District and just under 1,000 doses in the Benzie-Leelanau District. These are manageable weekly goals and we hope for additional doses to be allocated to the state quickly.

Due to the complexities that are outside of our control and the sheer number of people who wish to be vaccinated, we need to ask our communities to be patient. We have quickly established electronic mechanisms of tracking those who are interested as well as a community hotline for those who do not have adequate access to online resources. We are working through that list to schedule appointments in the order they were received. We will continue to balance the principles of equity and efficiency in our vaccination rollout to the very best of our ability. Please continue to be careful and protect yourself and those you love!