



Washington County Health Department

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For Immediate Release

Vaccines Are Our Best Tool Against COVID-19

As many areas in the country are beginning to experience surges in COVID-19 cases, this is a reminder to the community the pandemic is not over. We have entered into a new phase of this pandemic, where surges of positive cases and hospitalizations are being fueled overwhelmingly by unvaccinated individuals. The highly transmissible Delta variant is becoming widespread throughout the country and is taking hold in areas that have low vaccinations rates--areas just like Washington County. If you are fully vaccinated, you are well protected against hospitalization and death. The same reassurance and protection cannot be guaranteed for those who remain unvaccinated.

Washington County's positivity rate of 2.25% and case rate of 2.84 have steadily increased in recent weeks from .5% and .76 on July 7, 2021. Although these metrics are low, they are not trending in the right direction. The best action we can take to remain at our current metrics is for people to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Vaccination rates for Washington County are 42.8% for the total population and 50% for the eligible population of 12+. This low percentage does not bode well for our community avoiding a possible surge in cases, hospitalization, and deaths. Now is the time to remind everyone of the critical importance of getting vaccinated. "We have made significant progress over the past year, but I am deeply concerned about our low vaccination rates," said Washington County Health Officer Earl Stoner. "Vaccination is our fastest, most effective way out of this pandemic."

Current evidence indicates that COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the United States are effective against currently circulating variants, including the Delta variant. In the rare breakthrough cases seen in fully vaccinated individuals, most have led to mild symptoms or fully asymptomatic responses. Also of note, if you opted to forego your second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, a single dose is less effective against the Delta variant compared to previous variants.

There is still much work to be done as a community. In the fall people will start to congregate indoors and students will be back in school. We still have to protect children under 12 who are not currently eligible to be vaccinated and other vulnerable community members who may be immunocompromised. They depend on the people around them being vaccinated in order to

protect them from the virus. “It is now more important than ever that everyone who is eligible for the vaccine gets vaccinated,” said Stoner.

In an effort to improve access to COVID-19 vaccinations for eligible members of the community, the Washington County Health Department has been conducting clinics throughout the county.

Information regarding these clinics can be found at <http://WashCoVax.com>

COVID-19 vaccines are also available through Meritus Medical Center, as well as some health care providers and pharmacies throughout Washington County.

“If you compare the risks,” Stoner points out, “the risks from getting COVID-19 are much bigger than getting vaccinated. It's very clear vaccines work.” Now is the time to recommit ourselves and use all the tools at our disposal to protect our community. Taking immediate action is the most effective tool and vaccine doses are readily available in our community. While vaccines remain our best tool against COVID-19, following CDC masking guidance, social distancing when applicable, and appropriate hand hygiene will also help curb the spread of this latest surge of cases.