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Governor DeWine Provides Update On COVID-19 Hospitalizations and Ohio National Guard Deployment

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced today that he has ordered the mobilization of an additional 1,250 members of the Ohio National Guard to support hospitals with the most critical needs across the state. The mobilization comes on the same day the state set an all-time high for the total number of COVID-19 hospitalizations during the pandemic.

The [Ohio Hospital Association](#) reported today that 5,356 people are currently hospitalized with COVID-19. One in four patients are COVID-19 positive. This surpasses the previous hospitalizations record of 5,308 on Dec. 15, 2020. Of today's hospitalizations, 1,228 patients are in the ICU, which is approaching the record high of 1,318 ICU patients reported on Dec. 15, 2020.

Ohio National Guard Deployment

As hospitals struggle with staffing to support the surge in COVID-19 patients, Governor DeWine announced during a press conference today, that he has asked Major General John C. Harris, Jr., Adjutant General, Ohio National Guard, to mobilize an additional 1,250 members of the Ohio National Guard, bringing the total deployment of National Guard members working with Ohio's healthcare systems to 2,300 members.

"This is not something we take lightly... We are asking them to leave their families, their jobs and homes. This is a huge sacrifice," Governor DeWine said.

Governor DeWine previously authorized the deployment of 1,050 Ohio National Guard members on Friday, Dec. 17. Major General Harris said the Ohio National Guard's goal is to augment hospitals' medical staff and wraparound services. Teams including nurses and medics will provide clinical care and non-medical teams will offer support services such as food service, patient transportation within facilities, and administrative support.

Approximately 460 Guard members are deployed in the Cleveland area; more than 160 in the Toledo area; about 100 in Columbus area. Smaller numbers of the Guard will be deployed in the coming days in Mansfield, Dayton, and Lima to support hospitals. Guard personnel are also supporting testing sites in Cleveland and Akron.

“The National Guard has been indispensable,” said Robert Wyllie, MD, Chief Medical Operations Officer, Cleveland Clinic.

The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Hospital Association are working daily with Ohio hospitals to assess staffing needs to determine the most appropriate support from the Ohio National Guard.

“Everybody agreed when the decision was made to send in the National Guard to our hospitals ... All the way through this, we are going to be guided by where they are needed most today. It should give people confidence that everybody is on the same page here. Let’s deploy them where they are needed the most,” Governor DeWine said.

Hospitals

Hospitals have been taking extraordinary measures to manage this COVID-19 surge, including postponing elective surgeries, while battling staffing shortages as a result of COVID-19 infection or exposure, and burnout.

The northern parts of Ohio have been particularly hard hit, especially the greater Cleveland area, where one in three patients are COVID-19 positive, including ICU patients, according to OHA data.

“The hospital systems are under significant stress in Northern Ohio,” Dr. Wyllie said. “We are running 2,000 tests a day. Let me tell you about those tests: 36% of the people going into the Walker Center for testing are testing positive for COVID.”

Statewide, the COVID-19 positivity rate is 25%, according to [Ohio Department of Health data](#).

The state’s strategic hospital zone and region structure has allowed hospitals to work together with neighboring hospitals to balance the load of patients. This structure continues to be vital as cases and hospitalizations dramatically rise statewide and staffing remains a significant concern.

While Southwest Ohio is not seeing the same volume of patients as northern parts of the state, Richard P. Lofgren, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer, UC Health, expressed concerns about the surge in cases making its way across the entire state during the coming weeks.

“Unfortunately, the pandemic is not over ... we are seeing more cases now than we have ever seen along the way,” he said. “Now, the spread of Omicron is adding fuel to this raging fire. One of the things that I want to make sure that people understand, is that this not only affects

the care of people with COVID, but also affects people who don't have COVID. It squeezes out our ability to take care of patients with other life-serious or life-threatening problems, such as heart attacks and strokes.”

Governor DeWine also spoke with Jennifer Hollis, a critical care nurse at OhioHealth Riverside Methodist Hospital in Columbus, about her experience in the hospital.

“I just want everybody to be able to walk a mile in my shoes and kind of understand as a critical care nurse, what I am seeing when I am coming into work. It is beyond difficult,” Hollis said. “Our beds are full. There is nowhere else to go, and we are just as short-staffed as everyone else is seeing as well ... We are tired, we are frustrated, and we want the best for all of our patients.”

Hollis urged Ohioans to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. “I'll continue to fight for you, when you won't fight for yourself. Please get vaccinated. Quarantine if you are symptomatic. Get tested,” she said.

Vaccination, prevention

Governor DeWine emphasized that the COVID-19 vaccines remain a powerful tool to keep people out of the hospital. Since June 1, 2021, there have been 35,962 admissions, and 92.5% of those have been among people who are not fully vaccinated.

Now more than ever, it's critical to follow prevention strategies including getting vaccinated, getting a booster shot if eligible, wearing face masks, washing your hands frequently, getting tested, and staying home if sick, even if symptoms are mild.

“We are looking now at an impact of COVID-19 that is unlike anything we've seen before in this pandemic,” said Bruce Vanderhoff, MD, MBA, Director, Ohio Department of Health. “We have access to a powerful tool that can really shield us from the worst outcomes of COVID-19, and that is vaccination.”

As of today, more than 6.9 million Ohioans have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. That's 63% of those Ohioans eligible (ages 5 and older). More than 2.6 million have received an additional dose, or a booster dose.

Masking in Schools

Today, the Ohio Hospital Association also distributed a letter from the Ohio Hospital Association and Ohio Children's Hospital Association to Ohio school superintendents, administrators and school board members encouraging them to implement a masking requirement when students return from the holiday break. A masking requirement in schools will help limit community spread of COVID-19 and keep students in school, the letter said.

Holidays

Dr. Vanderhoff encouraged Ohioans to celebrate safely this holiday weekend so we can all have a healthy start to 2022. “As we get ready to ring in a new year, please, think about the steps you can take to prevent COVID-19 spread before you gather. Keeping vaccinations up

to date, appropriate testing, staying home if you feel the least bit sick, masking especially in crowded indoor environments, proper ventilation, and regular handwashing can all help prevent the spread of COVID-19, flu, and other illnesses this season,” he said.