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COVID-19 Update: Economic Recovery, Unemployment Insurance, Case Increases, Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted provided the following updates on Ohio's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Governor DeWine today outlined the progression of Ohio's economic recovery.

- Ohio's gross domestic product (GDP) outpaced the nation in the final quarter of calendar year 2020. The U.S. GDP is estimated to have grown 4.3 percent in the quarter, and Ohio's GDP is estimated to have increased 5 percent during the same timeframe.
- Ohio's unemployment rate in February 2021 was 5 percent and the national rate was 6.2 percent.
- This month, Ohio's tax revenues exceeded the monthly estimate by \$41 million, or 2.6 percent, and remain 4.3 percent above the estimate for the fiscal year-to-date. This is a dramatic improvement from one year ago.

These positive developments follow several steps taken by Governor DeWine at the onset of the pandemic to ensure that the state budget remained balanced and stable, including a freeze on state government spending, cuts in state staffing costs, and refinanced state bonds.

"I made these hard choices early on, tightening our belt because we did not know what the future held," said Governor DeWine. "A strong post-pandemic economy directly depends on defeating the virus, and as we are working hard to vaccinate Ohioans, we are seeing good signs in our economy as well."

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Using federal dollars strategically to shore up Ohio's unemployment system will also contribute to Ohio's year of recovery. Today, Governor DeWine recommended to the General Assembly that Ohio use a portion of its federal COVID relief and recovery dollars to pay off the Unemployment Insurance loan owed to the federal government.

"This loan was caused by the global pandemic, and paying it off now will free Ohio employers from this burden so they can instead focus on getting employees across our state back to work," said Governor DeWine. "This will help small businesses owners and employees, and I look forward to working with our partners in the General Assembly on legislation to pay off the loan."

"The Ohio Chamber of Commerce applauds Gov. DeWine's announcement today recommending a portion of the state's federal pandemic relief funds be used to pay off the state's unemployment compensation loan. Eliminating Ohio's outstanding federal unemployment loan balance and shoring up the state's trust fund will prevent employers from facing an estimated tax increase in 2022 of over \$100 million and could save employers as much as \$658 million in tax increases over a three-year period," said Ohio Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Andrew E. Doehrel. "The DeWine administration's investment will also prevent a repeat of the tax hikes employers were saddled with stemming from the 2008 recession when it took the state 8 years to pay back Ohio's federal unemployment loan of more than \$3.3 billion."

"During the last unemployment crisis, Ohio borrowed about \$3.4 billion to pay unemployment benefits to workers. During that time, Ohio employers were hit with federal interest and penalties that cost them over \$3 billion. Due to the COVID pandemic, Ohio is already over \$1.4 billion in unemployment compensation debt. To pay that back would be a huge cost to Ohio businesses who are trying desperately to recover and hire people," said Roger Geiger, Executive Director for NFIB in Ohio.

CASE INCREASES & OHIO PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY SYSTEM UPDATE

This week is the second week where the cases over two weeks per 100,000 people have gone up by more than 10. Two weeks ago, Ohio's cases per 100,000 people were 146.9. Today, case per 100,000 people is at 183.7.

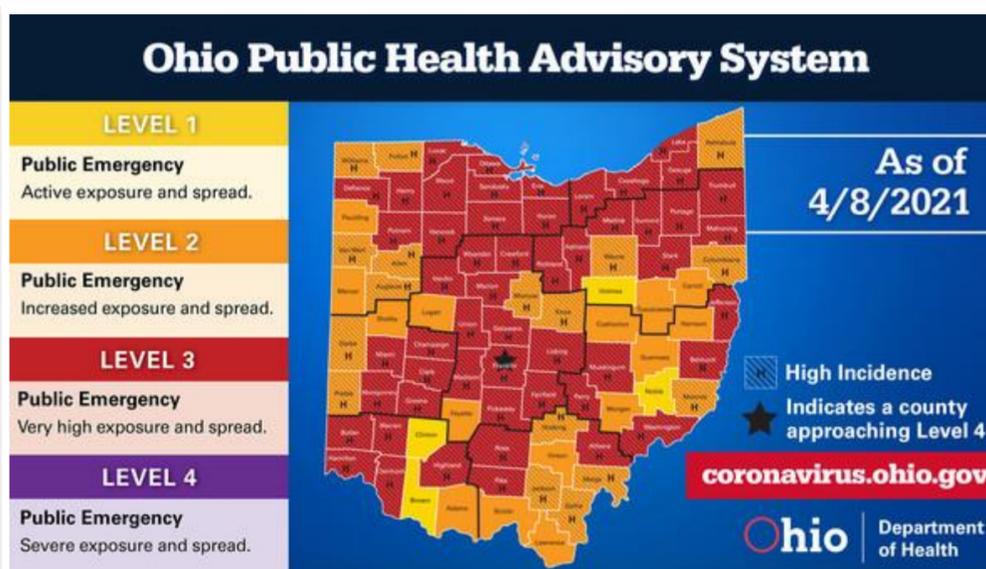
"We are moving in the wrong direction from our statewide goal of 50 cases per 100,000 people," said Governor DeWine. "We are not seeing the runaway case growth we saw during the fall yet, so we can still turn this around if more people continue to get vaccinated and we continue to mask and social distance."

The increases in case rates are reflected in this week's Ohio Public Health Advisory System map. New health data compiled by the Ohio Department of Health shows case increases in 53 counties over the past week.

Level changes include:

- Franklin County moved to the watch list following sustained increases in cases and in COVID-related healthcare use including emergency department and outpatient visits and hospitalizations for COVID.
- Putnam County moved from orange to red.
- Carroll, Mercer, and Morgan counties moved from yellow to orange.
- Brown and Noble counties dropped from orange to yellow.

According to Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, chief medical officer at the Ohio Department of Health, Ohio and the nation are enduring another wave of COVID-19 due to variants of the original virus that are more contagious and more deadly. Variant counts in Ohio jumped from 92 on March 12 to 797 today, a doubling time of about every 9-10 days.



MULTISYSTEM INFLAMMATORY SYNDROME IN CHILDREN

Although COVID-19 has historically affected older Ohioans, children are not immune to getting sick with coronavirus, and in some rare cases, kids can develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome. Since the start of the pandemic, 166 children have been treated for this syndrome since the start of the pandemic.

According to Dr. Dustin Fleck, chief of rheumatology at Dayton Children’s Hospital, this syndrome is unique because it is not associated with an active COVID infection. Rather, symptoms usually develop 2-4 weeks after a child has a symptomatic or asymptomatic COVID infection.

The syndrome is characterized by fever and inflammation throughout the body, specifically targeting the heart. The syndrome can also target the gastrointestinal system, liver, lungs, kidneys, and brain. Parents should look for symptoms of abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, swelling of hands and feet, and redness of eyes.

Dr. Fleck's full explanation of multisystem inflammatory syndrome is available on the [Ohio Channel's YouTube page](#).

CHOOSE OHIO FIRST SCHOLARSHIP

Lt. Governor Jon Husted highlighted a scholarship that boosts Ohio’s efforts to strengthen the state’s workforce in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The scholarship, part of the Choose Ohio First (COF) program, will support an estimated 3,400 Ohio students who are new to the program, along with an additional 3,000 existing COF scholars. The scholarship awards a total of \$69,826,882 over the next five years.

“The Choose Ohio First scholarship is helping Ohio students get a head start on their future careers, preparing them for in-demand jobs including coding and cybersecurity,” said Lt. Governor Husted, who led efforts to create the program as then-Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives. “This new investment shows how valuable a STEM education – and keeping those students in Ohio – is to the state. I encourage high school students to consider the Choose Ohio First program as they are looking at their future college education.”

This new COF scholarship will support students completing programs in the STEM disciplines at 57 colleges and universities across the state, including several schools that are new to the program.

BMV UPDATES

Lt. Governor Husted also announced enhancements to the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicle's (BMV) “Get In Line, Online” system.

The update allows customers to check in at the deputy registrar agency by using a QR code, located on the BMV deputy registrar storefront.

Instead of checking in at the self-service kiosk and waiting inside the agency, customers may now wait in their vehicle and will receive a text message with instructions when it is their turn to return to the agency to complete their transaction.

On March 16, QR codes were rolled out to approximately 10-20 agencies per week. By May, most agencies will have this “Get in Line, Online” enhancement available to customers.

The BMV is also reminding customers that the COVID-19 automatic extension that was applied to Ohio driver licenses, identification cards, and vehicle registrations is ending soon.

Visit bmv.ohio.gov for more information.

CASE DATA/VACCINE INFORMATION

In-depth COVID-19 data for Ohio: coronavirus.ohio.gov.

Ohio's central scheduling system: gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov

Ohio mass vaccination information: coronavirus.ohio.gov/massvaccinationclinics

All vaccine providers: vaccine.coronavirus.ohio.gov

More vaccine information: coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine

Video of today's full update, including versions with foreign language translation, can be viewed on the [Ohio Channel's YouTube page](#).

For more information on Ohio's response to COVID-19, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov or call 1-833-4-ASK-ODH.