



BOS Update 12.17.2021

Humboldt County continues to see COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations at a steady, moderately high level for the past month, plateauing above where our numbers were before a surge that began in July of this year. Our rural hospital infrastructure is managing to deal with what are still large numbers of COVID-19 patients occupying regular and ICU hospital beds daily, averaging around 10-15 total COVID-19 beds per day over the past 6-8 weeks. Any increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations with another surge will have an even larger impact on the hospitals' ability to care for other routine diseases and injuries. These routine day to day operations continue to be impacted at current COVID-19 levels per reports from hospital leadership, but we are fortunate that the hospitals are able to provide all services currently even if at slightly reduced capacity. Another surge of cases would impact the hospitals' ability to continue routine operations, likely leading to a reduction in routine and scheduled care, something we would like to avoid. COVID-19 infections in people who are unvaccinated continue to make up the large majority of hospitalizations and deaths here in Humboldt County as they do worldwide.

Humboldt County residents can see our data on the Humboldt Health Alert dashboard. This data tells us about the number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, broken down by age group. Looking at our graph of "hospitalization rate" by age group, one can see that the risk increases by age, something we've known throughout the pandemic. But risk is certainly not zero, even for the younger age groups. For the under age 20 infections the hospitalization rate is about 0.3%, or about 3 out of every 1000 COVID-19 infections end up in the hospital. For 20-29 year old this rate increases to 1 out of every 100 infections, or 1 percent, 2 out of every 100 infections for 30-39 year old, and 5 out of every 100 infections in 40-49 year old. And while these risks grow to 30%, or 3 out of every 10 infections hospitalized as age increases over 80, these hospitalizations in the older age group are becoming more rare as this is also the most highly vaccinated and boosted population. We are seeing more hospitalizations in the younger group because they are less vaccinated. Over time the risk is shifting toward the younger ages due to lower vaccination rates in this population.

To expand on this understanding of younger hospitalizations we did an analysis of Humboldt County Public Health Communicable Disease data on COVID-19 hospitalizations. This analysis showed some local trends helpful to understanding how COVID-19 is affecting those under age 50 in our County. These are all local Humboldt residents under age 50 who were hospitalized for COVID-19 complications, not patients who were hospitalized for other reasons and happened to be COVID-19 positive. Hospitalizations under the age of 50 have made up about 25% of all COVID-19 regular and ICU hospitalizations throughout the pandemic here in Humboldt County. There were 122 total hospitalizations of Humboldt County residents under the age of 50 out of 463 total COVID-19 hospitalizations at time of this writing. Of these 122 patients under the age of 50, 41 patients were ICU level care for COVID-19 (34%). The average age of these under 50 hospitalizations was 37.6. None of these patients under age 50 were fully vaccinated, and only 2 had one vaccine of the two-dose series. It



is clear based on this latest analysis that the hospital impact on the young and unvaccinated in our community is significant, and that we are seeing the national trends reflected locally that the unvaccinated are much more likely to become hospitalized, and while age is a risk factor for worsening disease and outcomes, all age groups are at risk. And that risk is shifting to a younger age group as that age group remains unvaccinated.

The young and unvaccinated are not the only ones where we are seeing uncharacteristic and disproportionate disease outcomes. Our local data show that American Native populations and Hispanic/Latinx populations in Humboldt have seen rates of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations 2-to-3 times higher than in other populations. And while these are small populations in our county and account for a small number of cases, the fact that severe disease is occurring at 3 times the rate in these groups is concerning for the impact it has on their families and their communities. And while vaccination rates are increasing in these communities, vaccination rates remain lower than the population as a whole. We have worked with tribal and Latinx partners to increase vaccine availability and messaging to these communities, and we will continue to build trust and confidence through partnerships that will help protect these groups as the pandemic continues.

We can see that the pandemic has hit some populations harder than others, and one of the most heartbreaking is the population of children losing a caregiver to COVID-19. In the US there are 140,000 children who lost a primary or secondary caregiver to COVID-19 death over the course of the pandemic so far. The impact of the pandemic on these families and these children is one more reason for everyone to do everything we can to stop the spread of this deadly disease through vaccination, testing, and masking. And it is for all these reasons above, younger cases of hospitalized patients, populations that are disproportionately affected, our youth who are losing their caregivers, that public health continues to recommend and require certain interventions that help to protect the vulnerable. These public health interventions in addition to protecting populations that are vulnerable and disproportionately affected are also protecting the functioning of important societal institutions such as healthcare, education, and workplaces. Without these public health interventions any or all of these populations and institutions would be overcome with rapidly spreading infection with significant ripple effects into the community. A recent study by The Commonwealth Institute showed that 1.1 million deaths and 10.3 million hospitalizations have been averted by vaccines alone in the US.

Going into this second holiday season with COVID-19 we have learned a lot. We are much better prepared to deal with the next wave of COVID-19 with Omicron than we were one year ago when vaccines had just arrived in small and limited supplies. We know how to mask, where to get tested, how to assess for risk in public settings, and how to decide when and if we want to take those risks. And if we take those risks, we know how to use the tools of vaccination, masking, testing, staying home when sick, and ventilation to make our holidays safer. Please enjoy what is definitely going to be a very different holiday for many of us this year when compared to last year. Enjoy, and stay safe. Happy holidays.

