

AS PREPARED ADDRESS TO OHIO
OHIO GOVERNOR MIKE DEWINE
THE OHIO STATEHOUSE
COLUMBUS, OH
MARCH 4, 2021

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Good evening.

My fellow Ohioans, one year ago today, our battle against the coronavirus began.

The day before, we made the decision to close the Arnold Classic, knowing that the virus was, in all likelihood, already here.

March 4, 2020, was our first full day in this fight, and none of us then fully understood the battle ahead.

This has been a tough year. Many of you lost a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, a spouse -- and some of you even lost a child.

Some of you have lost your job. Some of you have lost your business.

Yet, through this most difficult year, we did what Ohioans always do.

We rallied together. We sacrificed. We showed the world our Ohio grit!

Our communities have come together, and we have done things the Ohio way.

We have been careful. We have been caring.

And we have worked hard to protect the most vulnerable. Because THAT is what Ohioans do. We protect each other. We take care of our own.

In so many of our communities, teachers, superintendents, school staff, and families have made so many sacrifices to keep kids in school all year, working so very hard to keep our kids safe. They have followed the best safety measures, and those measures have worked.

And now, Ohio is a true leader in getting the rest of our kids back in school! We have vaccinated over 200,000 educators in just four weeks in February. And today, nearly 95 percent of our children are back in school -- in person -- learning!

We had a plan -- and we carried it out.

We're now on the offense. We have the most efficient, effective, and powerful weapon -- and that is the vaccine! And, we are implementing our Ohio Plan to prioritize the deployment of this vaccine to those Ohioans most likely to die if they get the virus:

Older Ohioans living in our communities and in nursing homes and assisted living facilities;

Ohioans with severe developmental disabilities;

And Ohioans born with very serious, life-threatening medical conditions, such as Down syndrome, cystic fibrosis, or cerebral palsy.

Our Ohio Plan has made sure that from the very start, vaccines are available in every community in the state. Today, we have over 1,200 separate locations, where all Ohioans can get a vaccine close to their home.

Not only that, we have taken the vaccine literally to the doorsteps of people who may have other barriers to accessing the vaccine. Every day, our Ohio National Guard and countless, tireless volunteers are vaccinating people at low-income senior housing locations, churches, and community health centers, and many other places.

And now, to date, we have vaccinated over 1.8 million Ohioans.

Yes -- we've got a ways to go. And yes -- we still need more vaccine. But, it is coming! At least 450,000 doses arrived in Ohio just this week -- more vaccine than in any previous week so far.

We started our vaccinations in December with Long-Term Care Facilities, including nursing homes. At that time, cases in nursing homes were over 2,800 per week. Today, after these vaccinations, that number is down to 268 cases per week -- one-tenth of what it was before we started vaccinating. And as a result, the number of COVID-19 patients in our hospitals has dropped dramatically.

We have not just vaccinated nursing home residents and gone away. Rather, we are implementing an innovative Ohio program that ensures that new residents, new employees, and those who initially chose not to take the vaccine can get vaccinated in the future in all of Ohio's 930 nursing homes!

Further, science has shown us that those living with developmental and congenital disorders are also at increased risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19. The coronavirus, for example, is 10 times deadlier for those living with Down syndrome.

And so, Ohio has led the way in making vaccine available to these vulnerable individuals. So far, more than 15,000 Ohioans with developmental and congenital disorders have received vaccinations, and more are receiving them every single day. In addition, more than 91 percent of

Ohioans with developmental disabilities living in our state's eight developmental centers have also received their vaccinations.

All of this weaves into our Ohio story -- our Ohio Plan -- and that plan is saving lives.

My fellow Ohioans -- victory IS in sight! However, there is still a threat out there. Scientists tell us that the virus in Ohio is fast morphing into a more highly contagious virus, and no one really knows the full impact that this change might bring.

The reality is that Ohioans continue to die each day from this virus. Each death is a tragedy, but there is something seemingly even more tragic and poignant about a death that occurs when the war is almost over and victory is close at hand.

My dad, Dick DeWine, was a private in the Army and fought in Europe during World War II. He served in K Company of the 103rd Infantry Division of the 7th Army. Dad told me about the final days of the War, and he told me this story from the official Company history (Task Force Kommando: Camp Howze, Texas, to Jenbach, Austria, by William Gleason):

“[T]he company was strafed . . . by two [German] ME-109 [fighter aircraft as they] were pursuing [our American] P-47s. Sergeant Bruno Pachisky was mortally wounded [The men of the Third Platoon] considered the loss of Pachisky as the toughest blow of the campaign.... [They] brooded for weeks over the cruel quirk of fate, which snuffed out the life of one who had come through the really tough days -- without so much as a scratch.”

Sergeant Pachisky was killed on April 27, 1945. The War ended just 10 days later.

The end of OUR fight is now in view, but we must continue pressing forward in these final days. We want all Ohioans to complete this vital mission together.

We must not relent.

In any struggle, when the end is clearly in view, there is a natural human tendency to let up -- to want to take your foot off the gas. I understand. I get it. All of us are sick of this virus!

But, we must resist this urge, and we must fight to the very end.

I can't tell you the exactly the day and time when we can declare victory. Nor can I predict how this virus will act in the coming days. No one can.

But, what we do know is this. We know we're close.

We know what works.

And, we know what we need to do to get to the other side of this.

Not only do we have, three highly effective vaccines, we have one battle-tested tool that has proven to work so well -- and that is masks. Study after study has shown that masks work. In fact, we did our own study in schools and learned that even when kids were not six feet apart and were in a classroom together, as long as they were wearing a mask, the virus simply did not spread.

Ohioans have been doing things right. And because of what Ohioans are doing -- faithfully wearing masks in schools, in businesses, and while shopping -- we have made significant strides in getting our lives back to normal.

The curfew has been lifted.

We no longer have stay-at-home orders.

Restaurants, bars, and gyms are open.

And we are looking forward to a spring with graduations and proms and a summer of fairs, festivals, concerts, and baseball!

Yes, we may start at 30 percent capacity for the Reds and Indians games and our Minor League teams, but we anticipate that as more and more of us get vaccinated, these percentages will grow until we have full ballparks, full concert halls, full theaters and full capacity at many other venues.

Now, let's talk for a moment about how we can measure our success.

I am often asked: When this will end? When we can lift the health orders? I have consulted Dr. Vanderhoff, our Department of Health Medical Director, and a number of epidemiologists and other health experts, and they tell me that now, with the vaccine, we can set realistic goals.

So tonight, I am announcing that when Ohio gets down to 50 cases per 100,000 people for two weeks, all health orders will come off. Cases per 100,000 people for a two-week period is a measure we have used since early in the pandemic. We show these numbers every week at our press conferences.

Achieving this goal is very doable. We can and we will do this!

Let me put these numbers in context.

On December 3, 2020, Ohio was at 731 cases per 100,000 people over the previous two weeks. On February 3, 2021 -- one month ago -- Ohio's cases were down to 445. And just yesterday, we were down to 179 cases.

In three months, we've gone down 550 cases per 100,000 people. Over the last month, alone, we've gone down 265 cases per 100,000. Ohio is on the right path to get to us to 50, and this is thanks to the vaccine and the hard work Ohioans are doing every day to help mitigate the virus.

Our path back is by continuing forward -- by wearing that mask and getting that vaccine. And while no one will be forced to take the vaccine, the more of us who can get vaccinated quickly, the more complete our victory, and the more confidently we can put this behind us.

Ohio -- THIS IS our path back.

We are now in the last few miles of what has been a grueling marathon.

We're tired.

But -- no marathoner pulls out on purpose at the 25-mile marker.

They know that they are almost to the finish line. THAT is when the marathoner digs even deeper from within to marshal the will to go on to that finish line. In the words of Ohio State legend and Olympic hero Jesse Owens, that is the moment when we cannot "give in to the pain" and "instead of going to the limit," we must go past it because that is "where victory is always found."

Ohio -- we must run through the tape at the end of this race! We need to keep going. We need to finish the job. And we need to finish strong!

My fellow Ohioans -- we can do this!

Thank you very much.