

AS PREPARED ADDRESS TO OHIO
OHIO GOVERNOR MIKE DEWINE
THE OHIO STATEHOUSE
COLUMBUS, OH
MAY 12, 2021

PANDEMIC HISTORY

Good evening.

In March of 2020, we faced tremendous unknowns as the first Coronavirus case was confirmed in our state.

We didn't know how quickly it would spread.

We didn't know the best way to test for it -- or how to treat it.

We didn't know if it would over-run our healthcare system.

And, we certainly did not know the enormity of the impact it would ultimately have on all our lives.

What we did know is that Ohioans are strong, caring, and resilient -- and that we would be in this together.

Ohioans dug deep. You showed grit, determination -- and great compassion.

Our exhausted and beleaguered nurses and healthcare workers acted so heroically.

Ohioans encouraged each other and looked out for each other -- from flying the American flag, to kids creating heartfelt chalk drawings on driveways reminding us to do our part, to our National Guard members helping at food banks.

Ohio's greatest natural and economic resource is -- and always has been -- our people. Early in this pandemic, I knew we would save our economy only by first saving lives.

And, by staying apart in those early months, Ohioans actually came together -- saving countless lives.

And then -- the vaccine arrived!

I will never forget that immense feeling of joy and relief as early on a cold, December morning, Fran and I watched a delivery truck bring the first precious doses of vaccine to Ohio.

At first, demand far outstripped supply. So, we prioritized our most vulnerable Ohioans -- the elderly, our healthcare workers, those born with serious medical conditions, and those with developmental disabilities.

Initially, we made the vaccine available through over 650 separate providers around the state. And now, we have more than 1,900 providers. We did this so that any eligible Ohioan would have easy access and could get their shots close to home.

We also made it a priority to get our kids back in school by vaccinating Ohio's teachers and school personnel. We set a goal to get our kids back to in-person learning by March 1st -- and we did just that!

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

So, where are we today?

Cases have dropped in Ohio. We set a goal, and are moving toward it.

As more and more eligible Ohioans get vaccinated, we're seeing more and more signs that the tide of this pandemic is finally turning in our favor.

[GO TO CHART]

Today, we're moving rapidly toward our goal of getting down to an average of 50 cases per 100,000 over a two-week period.

In December, that number topped more than 800.

Four weeks ago, it was 200.

Two weeks ago, it was 155.

And today, it is 123. Lately, this number has been dropping about two to three points per day.¹

So how are we doing in comparison to our neighboring states in regard to case numbers?

I always look to see how we are doing in relationship to our neighboring states. Each state is different. Each has different challenges. And we have, at times, been behind some of our neighboring states on different metrics, but here's where we stand today.

[GO TO NEXT CHART]

According to the CDC, Ohio's cases per 100,000 as averaged over the past week are the lowest of all our neighboring states.² That is great news!

¹ Ohio Department of Health data.

² https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days.

More good news is that fewer Ohioans are in the hospital for COVID today than they were in the days before we had a vaccine. In fact, we have seen more than a 75 percent drop in our COVID-19 hospitalization count since we got the vaccine. On January 10th, we had over 4,200 Ohio citizens in our hospitals for COVID. Today, we have 964.³

We have also made great progress in protecting our vulnerable Ohioans in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. When we first got the vaccine, we prioritized our nursing home residents. In the months since, we have made sure that all nursing homes and assisted living facilities continue to be supplied each week with vaccines -- and the results have been amazing! While at one time, we had over 2,800 new cases per week in our nursing homes, today we are averaging less than 200 per week.⁴

Further, as of today, almost 78 percent of Ohioans who are 65 years-of-age and older have been vaccinated.⁵

KIDS AGED 12 TO 15

We can also rejoice now that the FDA and the CDC are completing the process of making the Pfizer vaccine available for 12- to 15-year-olds. We will start vaccinating these children in Ohio starting tomorrow morning. Fran and I have several grandchildren that age and are so happy that they, too, will be able to get the vaccine.

According to Dr. Sherman Alter [all – ter], a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Dayton Children’s, vaccinating children will help us beat back the virus even further. “The way we’re really going to control this pandemic is to vaccinate a higher number of individuals, including children. While it generally is a milder illness, [some of these kids can get very sick.]”

He went on to say that “the risk of this vaccine -- of an adverse side effect -- is so minimal compared to the benefit of preventing a potentially serious and/or life-threatening disease. To me, the vaccine always wins out.”⁶

In preparation for the vaccination of 12- to 15-year-olds, Ohio’s children’s hospitals and pediatricians are already working with local groups to make the vaccine available to their patients and members of their community. These vaccines cannot come too soon for our children. In April, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Children’s Hospital Association reported that cases in children represented more than 22 percent of all new COVID cases.⁷

³ Ohio Department of Health data.

⁴ Ohio Department of Health data.

⁵ Ohio Department of Health data.

⁶ *Dayton Daily News*, May 12, 2021.

⁷ <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%204.29.21%20FINAL.pdf>.

Getting these children vaccinated is so vitally important. According to an article in today's *Cincinnati Enquirer*, children now make up a quarter of cases for COVID-19 in Hamilton County, and some children are sick enough for hospital stays. According to Dr. Patty Manning, Chief of Staff at Cincinnati Children's, "Every day, we have children hospitalized with COVID.... They can become quite ill."⁸

LIFTING OF HEALTH ORDERS

And so now, let's talk about the health orders. For a year, Ohioans have made sacrifices to save lives and keep our state moving forward. What you have done has truly worked!

And now, we have a powerful weapon that is almost 100 percent effective in beating the virus.

The vaccine is stronger and better than medical experts ever imagined. And now, everyone 12 and over can use it to protect themselves -- to put an invisible shield of protection around themselves. Everyone can now control their own health. Everyone can now control their own destiny.

So, it is time -- it's time to end the health orders.

It's been a year.

You've followed the protocols.

You've done what we've asked.

You've bravely fought this virus.

And now, our cases are down, and we have a tested and proven weapon in the vaccine that all Ohioans 12 and over can utilize.

THE VACCINATED AND THE UNVACCINATED

While we have this great weapon, the danger of remaining unvaccinated is crystal clear. The virus is still here. Our cases are down, but that's only because 42 percent of our entire population has now been vaccinated and can no longer get it and can no longer spread it.

The vaccinated among us feel liberated. They can hug their grandkids, go out to eat, go to a ball game -- live their life -- all without fear.

But, for those who are not vaccinated, the virus is just as dangerous as ever. In fact, because the new variant is more contagious, the virus is really more dangerous than ever for those who are not vaccinated.

⁸ Cincinnati Enquirer, May 12, 2021.

Vaccination is clearly safer -- regardless of age -- than running the risk of getting COVID. In fact, thanks to a recent study from the Cleveland Clinic, we now have evidence from right here in Ohio of just how powerful these vaccines really are. Between January 1st and April 13th this year, of all the people hospitalized at the Cleveland Clinic for COVID-19, 99.75 percent of them had not been vaccinated. Let me repeat that: Nearly 100 percent of hospitalizations occurred among those not vaccinated. This is powerful, real-world evidence from the Buckeye State that vaccinations do, in fact, save lives.⁹

Each person now has access to a mighty weapon they can use to get 100 percent protection, and it is up to each Ohio citizen whether to use it or not. There comes a time when individual responsibility simply must take over.

Ohio Department of Health Director Stephanie McCloud will remove all pandemic health orders, except those for nursing homes and assisted living facilities, effective three weeks from today on June 2nd. This will give anyone who has not been vaccinated time to get the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine or the first dose of Pfizer or Moderna and be well on the way to full immunity.

Now, lifting these orders does not mean the virus is gone.

It does not mean we are all safe.

Each Ohio citizen will make their own decisions about wearing a mask and social distancing -- and when, for them, that's appropriate. Ohio businesses and schools, as well, will make their own decisions about how to best keep their customers, employees, and students safe. Lifting these health orders will not prevent a business from imposing its own requirements. In fact, based upon the experiences of other states, we expect that many stores or businesses may require social distancing and masking.

OHIO STATEWIDE DRAWINGS

The number of Ohioans who get the vaccine will determine what our future looks like, particularly this coming winter.

Everyone has a stake in more Ohioans getting vaccinated.

And so tonight, I am asking businesses across Ohio to reach out and offer incentives to get more people vaccinated. The Reds and Indians are offering discounts on tickets to their games. The minor league teams are, as well. With a vaccine, White Castle is offering free butter cakes on a stick! Kroger is offering employees \$100 in cash. And Scott's Miracle-Gro, Worthington Industries, Marathon Petroleum, and many others have provided clinics at work sites for their employees and their families. We need more businesses to offer these kinds of incentives.

⁹ <https://www.axios.com/study-hospitalized-coronavirus-patients-unvaccinated-7ed34f63-fd1d-437c-b4b7-0c1dd3600a15.html>.

Getting our 12- to 17-year-olds vaccinated is so important that we will have a separate incentive for them. Two weeks from tonight -- on Wednesday, May 26th -- we will announce the winner of a drawing of all those 17 years-old and under who have been vaccinated, and the winner will receive a full, four-year scholarship to our State of Ohio universities. This will include tuition, room-and-board, and books.

Next Tuesday, on May 18th, an electronic portal will be opened up for young people who have been vaccinated to be able to register.

We will do this every Wednesday, for five straight Wednesdays -- each time randomly selecting one student to receive the full, four-year scholarship.

Now, let's talk about the adults. Two weeks from tonight on May 26th, we will announce a winner of a separate drawing for adults who have received at least their first dose of the vaccine. This announcement will occur each Wednesday for five weeks, and the winner each Wednesday will receive 1 million dollars.

The pool of names for the "Ohio Vax-a-Million" drawing will be derived from the Ohio Secretary of State's publicly available voter registration database.

Further, we will make available a webpage for people to sign up for the drawings if they are not in a database we are using.

The Ohio Department of Health will be the sponsoring agency for the drawings, and the Ohio Lottery will conduct them. The money will come from existing federal Coronavirus Relief Funds.

To be eligible to win, you must be at least 18 years of age or older on the day of the drawing. You must be an Ohio resident. And, you must be vaccinated before the drawing.

We will have further, specific details tomorrow and in the days ahead.

I know that some may say, "DeWine, you're crazy! This million-dollar drawing idea of yours is a waste of money." But truly, the real waste at this point in the pandemic -- when the vaccine is readily available to anyone who want it -- is a life lost to COVID-19.

DON'T QUIT YET

My fellow Ohioans, you got us to where we are today.

You sacrificed.

You persevered.

And many times, you have set the bar for the rest of the nation.

Let's show America again what Ohio is made of!

Let's show the nation that same grit and determination in our efforts to get the rest of Ohio vaccinated!

Yes -- we have achieved a lot. We are safer today. And the future of Ohio has never been brighter because of your efforts in fighting this pandemic.

But, our work is not done. We now have an abundance of the vaccine and must continue every effort to make it available and accessible to every Ohioan who wants it.

Those who are not vaccinated remain prey to the virus. We hope for a good summer, but we also have to be able to get through the dark days of winter safely. To do that, we need a much higher percentage of Ohioans to be vaccinated.

This is our time -- and, vaccines are our opportunity.

Ohio -- let's do this! Let's get it done. Let's get everyone vaccinated.

Because we are Ohioans.

We are Buckeyes.

We are strong.

And we will finish the job!