



County of Malheur

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

Agricultural workers become eligible for vaccine on Monday

Governor Kate Brown announced during a press conference today that the state's COVID-19 [vaccine timeline](#) has been accelerated to meet the federal promise of eligibility for all adults by May 1. Additionally, counties with agricultural workers have been given the flexibility to vaccinate that population beginning March 22.

“This is great news for Malheur County, whose economy relies heavily on the health and well-being of these valued and essential workers,” Malheur County Health Department Director Sarah Poe said. “We are ready to begin vaccinating this population and have been working with food processors and onion sheds to make plans for scheduling vaccines at worksites throughout the county.”

Speeding up the eligibility timeline in Malheur County was one of three COVID-19-related requests the county made in a [letter](#) submitted to the governor's office today. Signed by Poe and Malheur County Judge Dan Joyce, the letter asks the state to:

- Move Malheur County to a “medium sized” county for the purpose of risk assessment
- Change the county risk metrics to match the recently updated “Ready Schools Safe Learners” guidance
- Allow Malheur County to immediately open vaccination eligibility to [Phase 1B, Groups 6 and 7](#)

“We have plans to continue weekly vaccine clinics, to support additional healthcare providers and pharmacies, and to start taking vaccine to locations where disproportionately affected populations live and work. This includes very rural communities, onion sheds, and organizations that serve people experiencing houselessness. This takes a great effort logistically, especially to not waste doses when vials are opened,” the letter states.

The letter also requests that the roughly 3,000 adults in custody at Snake River Correctional Institution be removed from Malheur County's population count, which would change the metrics the state uses to determine the county's risk level.

MORE

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“We appreciate the fact that your office removes Adults in Custody (AIC) residing at Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) when determining the case rates for our county. We request that the nearly 3,000 AIC also be removed from the population number for consistency and recognition that they are not contributing to community spread. Removing 2,900 AIC from the approximate 32,000 population of Malheur County would take us out of the large county group. ... The metrics seem to be divided by county size to be fair and in this unique situation, Malheur is unfairly considered a large county without the same risks and population outside of SRCI.”

The letter also points out that until recently, school and county metrics mirrored each other. Now, school-setting guidance in the updated [“Ready Schools Safe Learners”](#) document is less restrictive than general population guidance, even though school settings are less protected.

“Risk categories that respond to the falling risk statewide, especially given increased protection with immunization, makes the most sense. Our schools are the setting that will have some of the least protection from immunization, considering children are not yet eligible,” the letter states.

“We appreciate all the hard work at the state level and we’re hopeful that Gov. Brown will take our requests into consideration. Our priority continues to be the health of our community, which includes not just physical health but social, emotional, and financial health as well. The issues addressed in today’s letter have an impact on all of those,” Poe said.

Other COVID-19 updates from today’s press conference include:

- Beginning on March 22, counties that attest to having largely completed vaccinations of seniors can start offering vaccine to adults age 45+ who have underlying health conditions.
- No later than April 19, vaccine eligibility opens to frontline workers and people of all ages with underlying health conditions.
- On May 1, vaccine eligibility opens to all Oregonians age 16+.
- All Oregonians will have had the opportunity for at least one dose of vaccine by the end of May.
- To date, 938,900 Oregonians have received at least one vaccine dose, just less than 1 out of every 3 adults.
- “We need somewhere between 7 or 8 out of 10 Oregonians to get vaccinated in order to achieve critical mass and shut down the virus so it can’t spread and put more lives and livelihoods at risk,” Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen said.

Video Links

- A recording of today's live-streamed press conference is available [here](#). Please note the video starts at the 31:30 mark.
- A recording of a Spanish language translation is available on OHA's Facebook page [here](#). Please note the video starts at the 1:03 mark.

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