

Hello, my name is Joel Strasz, Health Officer with the Bay County Health Department. Today is Tuesday, February 2nd and this is our weekly COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccine update.

Whats the status of COVID-19 in Bay County?

The good news is that the virus levels have dropped considerably since November and December, almost in half to what they were and even further our test positivity rate is now below 5% and that's a good thing. We haven't been that low since the beginning of October, we still have a ways to go but we are moving in a positive direction. We do have some concerns about some of the variants that are showing up here in Michigan, the United States and throughout the world and we'll talk more about those in a few minutes but in the meantime we all need to do our part we all need to wear a mask, wash hands, and keep our distance. In addition to that as vaccine becomes more available we all need to get vaccinated and that's part of the reason too why we're engaging with you on a daily on a weekly basis.

Whats the status of COVID-19 vaccine distribution in Bay County?

Well, we're starting to see slight increments in the supply of vaccine and that's a good thing and we're cautiously optimistic that more vaccine supply will become available in the coming weeks. We hope to see that by March we have a full roster of vaccines to provide and that all of our vaccine demands can be met but we're still dealing with really bad supply problems right now.

What can you tell us about the different variants of the COVID-19 virus?

Okay so let's talk about the variants and you've probably heard a lot about this in the news and they're causing a lot of concern. What do we actually know about the variants is first that there are three different types of variants that we're concerned about the first one is the UK variant or B117, the second is the south African variant B1351, and the third is South American variant E484k. The thing that is known about these variants are they seem to be more transmissible and more efficient at transmitting than the old variants. It's important to note however that the virus is constantly mutating and that there are thousands of types of variants that have sprung up since the beginning of the pandemic last year. While we do know that these variants are more transmissible, there's still a lot to be learned about whether or not that the vaccines are effective against them and it seems at this point in time at least for the uk variant that most of the vaccines are effective at combating that particular type of variant, but there's more study that has to be completed.

What is the Health Department doing to improve the registration and scheduling of vaccines?

Well, we are constantly trying to make improvements and to make the scheduling and registration system more effective and more responsive to our residents needs. We're doing that particularly by trying to identify those most at risk, especially people over the age of 65 and tier 1A and tier 1B workers, especially first responders and teachers. We're working with employers so that we can effectively vaccinate those particular employees in the coming weeks. We hope

to employ a system where identified individuals can choose a vaccination date, time, and site at their own needs electronically. There's more to come so please be patient.

What can I do to prepare for when I get a call to schedule my appointment?

Well, we've talked before about keeping a watchful eye on your phone and your email so that you can effectively respond to our schedulers and vaccine registrars for the to make an appointment. To help this process along there are a few essential data items that you can provide. First being your complete name, address, and a working telephone number. Second would be a working email account that you've got access to. Third would be having access to your insurance information including your group number and serial number. Most importantly if you're age 65 or older, your spouse's information as well. This last item is important especially for couples over the age of 65. We here at the Bay County Health Department are trying to schedule spouses and eligible family members at the same time as much as we possibly can. The representative from the Health Department should ask you in regards to your spouse's vaccination status if it's applicable. If they do not, please inquire and ask them so that we can attempt to provide your spouse with the vaccine at the same time. This is not always done but we're going to try to make this more the norm than the exception.

I have had my first dose and have not yet heard when I will get my second dose. What can I do?

There are some simple things that you can do. First inquire at the time of your first vaccine appointment and note on your vaccine card when you are due for a second dose. If you did not receive a card ask for one at the vaccine clinic and our representatives will be more than happy to grant you one. Second is check your phone and your email on a regular basis especially on those days leading up to the second vaccination appointment. Often times vaccine supply lines can be interrupted or delayed and there may be delays. We're working closely with the state of Michigan to rectify these types of situations but always check your phone and your email.

What should I do if I have registered with multiple providers and one of them calls me before the Health Department?

So you may have received an appointment from another provider in the community and they have offered you an appointment before the Bay County Health Department has contacted you. By all means take that appointment, make that appointment, and get vaccinated.

May I just show up to a clinic at the Community Center or Delta College to get a vaccine anytime?

You need to be registered and you need to have an appointment. You cannot just show up for a vaccine.

I've registered and got an appointment. Can I transfer that appointment to my spouse, son/daughter, or anyone else?

Actually, no it's not allowable. We need you to keep your appointment date and time. If you need to cancel your appointment then contact the Health Department through the number that your representatives have provided you with to cancel your appointment and then in turn we will provide the vaccine to someone that's on our on call list. However we can't make last minute substitutions without having a person registered.

Which vaccine is best to get? Can I get them both?

The short answer is that there are two vaccines that are currently available today. There's the Pfizer Bioentech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. They are both mRNA vaccines and they are virtually effective at the same rate so not one vaccine is better than the other. As far as substituting vaccines go, remember once you're on a vaccine track with one specific vaccine you have to finish that track, so if you start with a Pfizer vaccine you've got to finish with the Pfizer vaccine and if you start with the Moderna vaccine you've got to finish with that vaccine. You can't mix and match or switch.

What is the Health Department doing to make sure the the vaccine doses get to the right people?

So with vaccines being in short supply right now we're constantly looking at our registration list to make sure that the right vaccine gets to the right people, at the right time and part of that is to look at those groups and those persons that are most vulnerable especially people over the age of 75 and people 65 and older, which is a considerable part of the Bay county population. One in four residents in Bay county are over the age of 60. This is a huge number in comparison to other counties and we have just a limited supply of vaccine.

We're looking at the registration list on a daily basis to ensure that these seniors and these folks that are most in need of vaccine get those vaccines. We might not be as responsive as everyone would like us to be, but please know that we just have a limited supply of vaccines at this point in time so we're doing our best to get everyone vaccinated as quickly as possible.

So that wraps it up for Tuesday, February 2nd. Please keep an eye on the Bay County Health Department's website, our Facebook page, and this particular YouTube channel. Thank you again and see you next week.