



MEMO

To: Mayor McClure and Members of City Council
From: Katie Towns, Acting Director of Health
Date: May 11, 2021
Re: Support to repealing masking ordinance

Overview

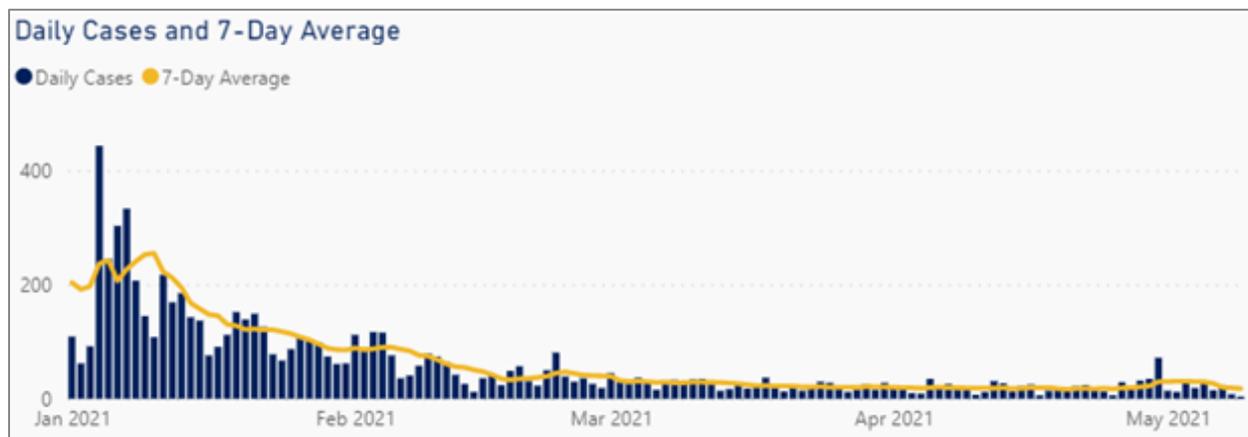
The Springfield City Council has taken many courageous steps to protect our community from COVID-19 since March of last year. In the face of a rapidly expanding and deadly new virus about which little was known, swift and decisive action was taken. Since that time, our understanding of and the impact of the virus have evolved, as has the local response. Evidence, education, mitigation, and regulation have created the foundation for navigating the response. These steps have had two primary purposes – protecting the health care system from being overwhelmed and protecting vulnerable individuals from SARS CoV-2 by decreasing the devastating illness and deaths associated with COVID-19. The ordinances and associated mitigation strategies have served their purpose and as a result have saved numerous lives from severe disease and death.

We are now 425 days from our community's first case of COVID-19 and have reached a crucial point in the pandemic and in our community's response. In the last year, we have learned much about the disease. We have experience and evidence to provide us with more confidence in how we move forward. The widespread availability of vaccine and stabilized case rates and hospitalizations have created an environment to allow us to take the next step on the Road to Recovery. Therefore, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department supports repealing the ordinance that requires masking on May 27th, which coincides with the last day of school in Springfield.

This does not mean that the virus is gone from the community nor does it indicate the end of the pandemic, in fact, quite the opposite. COVID-19 has become and will continue to be an ever-present threat for unvaccinated individuals for the foreseeable future. Our department will continue to work closely with partners to slow the spread of disease and continue to vaccinate people in order to most effectively reduce the spread of disease and save lives.

COVID-19 Cases and Hospitalizations

As of May 11, on the SGCHD COVID-19 dashboard, the 7-day average of daily cases is 16, and on May 10, the number of COVID-19 patients in Greene County hospitals is 31. These numbers have decreased significantly since the peak of disease in early January 2021 when the 7-day average case count peaked at 252. On April 28th, the 7-day average daily cases rose above 20 for the first time in weeks. Likewise, hospitalizations recently experienced increases in rates, then after a short period moderated. These increases in cases and hospitalizations were not due to just one cluster of cases, but rather from seemingly unconnected cases. These conditions have led our department's epidemiologists to believe that this was due to the variant strain of COVID-19.



As we closely monitored cases and hospitalizations increasing slightly, there are two things that stand out as significant. The first is that the growth of cases was not exponential, but rather linear, showing a slower rate of growth. The second is how quickly the increase in cases moderated, dropping back to 20 cases a day in just 9 days. These two factors suggest that there is currently significant community protection from the virus, gained through a temporary immunity from recently recovering from COVID-19 and the growth of people who are vaccinated. COVID-19 is becoming an endemic disease for communities across the world – it is and will be a regular part of the community and will continue to affect individuals, particularly those who are unvaccinated. In these scenarios, both the healthcare and public health systems have ongoing capacity to respond in these situations.

Current Status of Vaccinations

Since April 9, all Missourians ages 16 and older have been eligible to receive the vaccine. As of May 11, on SGCHD COVID-19 dashboard, the percent of eligible individuals who are fully vaccinated is 34%. Taking a closer look at those most vulnerable, the vaccination rate among those 65 and older in Greene County is 67%.¹ While this progress significant, it also means that 60% of eligible people are unvaccinated (6% are partially vaccinated). Unfortunately, the pace of vaccine uptake has slowed steadily since early April, leaving many unprotected. This is despite the widespread availability of vaccine. While this slowing down was expected, it occurred sooner than initially anticipated. We now have a surplus of vaccine supply and this means that by the end of May, everyone eligible would have had 7-weeks to be vaccinated.

The slowing down in vaccine uptake does not mean that most people will not get the vaccine, but rather they might not be as willing to seek it out as others. Our department, as well as many other vaccinators, are taking the vaccine out into the community to encourage continued progress with local vaccination rates. This new strategy is having success but is a much slower path. Walk-in clinics and onsite efforts are providing greater access to vaccine and will become SGCHD's primary focus this summer. Additionally, the Pfizer vaccine received Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA for individuals ages 12 to 15 on May 10.² As vaccines are approved for younger ages, the number of people with protection will continue to grow.

Vaccine is the solution to overcoming individual and community challenges associated with COVID-19. This is not a unique scenario; vaccines have turned the tide against many diseases that have ravaged society: polio, smallpox and measles to name a few.³ Mitigation strategies such as masking, social distancing and occupancy restrictions are evidence-based public health measures aimed to slow the rate of infection in the community.⁴ Ideally, they are tools to employ while treatment and prevention are developed to more fully stop the disease. With SARS CoV-2, the vaccine is the tool that will not just slow but stop the spread of disease. But, to realize the full impact and effect of

¹ Centers for Disease Control. COVID-19 Integrated County View; <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>; 2021.

² Food and Drug Administration. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: FDA Authorizes Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use in Adolescents in Another Important Action in Fight Against Pandemic; <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine-emergency-use>; 2021.

³ Centers for Disease Control. Impact of Vaccines in the 20th and 21st Centuries; <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/appendices/e/impact.pdf>; 2019.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control. Community Mitigation Framework; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-mitigation.html>; 2021.

the vaccine, it becomes an individual as well as a community responsibility to be vaccinated to protect ourselves and our community.

Future Burden of COVID-19

The SARS CoV-2 virus is not going away anytime soon. Its ability to infect people and spread throughout a community has been shown repeatedly.⁵⁶⁷ It has shown the capability to mutate, and some variants have shown to be more infectious and more severe.⁸ While many unvaccinated individuals may still have natural immunity that remains once they recover from SARS CoV-2, the immunity is temporary, not guaranteed and so far has is not as effective as the immunity provided by the vaccine.⁹¹⁰ As natural immunity wanes, these individuals are once again more likely to become infected with COVID-19 and the problem is exacerbated by variants of the disease.

So far, vaccines have proven to be the long-term solution. In both clinical trials and in real-world experiences, they have demonstrated the ability to prevent the majority of infections and reduce severity in breakthrough cases. They have shown to be effective against current variant strains of the SARS CoV-2 virus and can be updated with a booster dose to provide protection to new variants.¹¹ Locally, since the introduction of vaccine, only 2 percent of all cases of COVID-19 have occurred in those that are fully vaccinated, and the majority of those cases have been asymptomatic or mild. Vaccines can also continue to be developed and adapted with changes in the virus to provide booster doses, which will provide improved and lasting protection.

The burden of COVID-19 will be focused on people who remain unvaccinated, especially in populations that have experienced more severe disease, such as those aged 65 and

⁵ Centers for Disease Control. COVID Data Tracker; <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>; 2021.

⁶ Emerging Infectious Diseases. Clusters of Coronavirus Disease in Communities, Japan, January-April 2020; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7454082/>; 2020.

⁷ Emerging Infectious Diseases. High Contagiousness and Rapid Spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2; <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2607.200282>; 2020.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control. COVID-19, About the Variants; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>; 2021.

⁹ The Lancet. Dynamics of SARS CoV-2 neutralizing antibody responses and duration of immunity: a longitudinal study; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247\(21\)00025-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247(21)00025-2/fulltext); 2021.

¹⁰ New England Journal of Medicine. Durability of Responses after SARS-CoV-2 mRNA-1273 Vaccination; <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2032195>; 2021.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control. COVID-19, Vaccines Work; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html>; 2021.

older COVID-19 and its variants have continued to show the ability to infect and rapidly spread among those who are unvaccinated, causing more severe disease and death. Unfortunately, this threat will remain until enough people choose to get vaccinated, which will in time provide community protection.

Recommended Repeal of Ordinance

Based on these factors and despite the limitations, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department supports removal of the current ordinance on May 27th, which coincides with the last day of school in Springfield. Maintaining the current ordinance through May will allow the use of best practices through the end of the school year to provide protection for children not eligible for vaccine while continuing to increase the percent of the community that are vaccinated. Additionally, maintaining the use of current mitigation strategies during a time when gatherings and celebrations are common will limit exposures and keep people safe during these gatherings. Although this position varies from guidance outlined in the Indicators for Stepping Out of the Road to Recovery (e.g. red, yellow, green), the local data and experience have changed as well. Recent case numbers and hospitalizations demonstrate that increases are likely to be modest and temporary. Vaccine has been widely available since April 9th with ample supply. This data and experience provide the SGCHD with greater confidence in public health and health care capabilities to respond to future cases of COVID-19. Individuals who want to protect themselves with vaccine have had a chance to do so.

Public health recommendations and guidance to the community to encourage personal and community responsibility will continue. People have the tools they need to protect themselves – the best tool being vaccine. Vaccine is now available for everyone ages 12 and older.¹² SGCHD will continue to prioritize reaching underserved individuals with vaccine and vaccinations will continue to be available in multiple locations throughout our region. We will pursue new opportunities to educate the community about the importance of vaccine and utilize personal mitigation strategies to reduce spread. The removal of the ordinance will not impact public health guidance to protect the most vulnerable in our community – in fact we will encourage continuation of masking if you are unvaccinated,

¹² Food and Drug Administration. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: FDA Authorizes Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use in Adolescents in Another Important Action in Fight Against Pandemic; <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine-emergency-use>; 2021.



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around vulnerable populations and advocate for respect of policies in private businesses that require masking to best serve their constituents.

The ordinance has served its purpose and helped us achieve our goals. Capacity restrictions and masking mandates have helped moderate cases to avoid overwhelming hospitals and protect vulnerable populations. The ordinance has helped the community reduce disease to a level of disease that is manageable moving forward. While herd immunity may not be imminent, we are prepared for COVID-19 to be a regular part of our public health response.