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HOSPITALS EXPRESS DOUBTS ABOUT GOVERNOR'S LATEST VACCINE PLAN

Adding teachers first will delay doses for seniors; with limited supply hospitals concerned the state can't deliver on promises after raising hopes

Lake Oswego, Ore. – January 22, 2021 – The following is a statement from Becky Hultberg, President and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals & Health Systems:

“We are deeply concerned that the Governor, by expanding eligibility to teachers and other school employees in addition to seniors aged 65 and older, is increasing demand for the vaccine far beyond available supply in some regions. Since the state does not control the vaccine supply, Oregonians are being asked to take it on faith that the state can keep to the Governor’s timeline.

In some regions of the state, supply can meet the demand. It is important that these areas are free to move ahead with their vaccination efforts. However, it is critical that all Oregonians understand that given current supply, some hospitals will be unable to meet the demand for vaccinations. Hospitals are constrained by the available supply and are obligated to focus on the Governor’s prioritized eligibility list.

Some regions of the state have not completed vaccinating the Phase 1(a) population, but beginning next week the majority of supply will go to teachers. It will take several weeks to get through teachers in the Portland metro area based on current supply, and that does not include vaccinating the remainder of Phase 1(a). Adding 80-year-olds on Feb. 8 and then other age bands in the weeks after that will compound this problem.

At 15,000 doses a week in the Portland metro area, we should all be honest about the fact that there will be significant wait times for vaccines and that completing our efforts will take many, many months unless supply increases.

Setting unreasonable expectations will not speed up vaccinations but will lead to confusion on the part of Oregon seniors, and will increase the operational burden borne by hospitals tasked with explaining to those who believe they have a place in line that they will have to wait even longer.

If you are in a prioritized population in February in the Portland metro area, it is likely you will not get a vaccination for weeks, or maybe even months, after the date you are prioritized. If you have concerns or challenges in scheduling, please do not call hospitals. We are doing the best we can with the supply we have and following the directives from the Oregon Health Authority and the Governor’s Office.

Our hospitals and community partners have made great strides in creating vaccine programs from scratch with virtually no state or federal help, including funding. We are concerned that the current

plans will add stress and potential chaos to these efforts as facilities are inundated with anxious residents seeking the vaccine.”

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