

Del Norte vaccination rate only around 1 in 3 adults so far

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Del Norte County's COVID-19 vaccination rates are lower than most of the rest of the state, and lower than some health officials would hope.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, Del Norte County's public health officer, told the board of supervisors Tuesday the county has vaccinated about one third of the county's adults (behind the state's 45%).

"We're hopeful that we can get more," Rehwaldt said. "We think that the biggest news that people should think about in making this decision is the fact that we have some variants in our county. They've been identified — not a lot yet, but we've had the California variant for some time that we've known about, and we now have the (U.K. variant), and we think that we're going to get more."

Rehwaldt said the county's also seen an uptick in cases in recent weeks.

“Mostly we see again its family contacts between families and friends. And that’s a hard thing to get around, because if people are going to just get the virus in their family and it gets going, it’s hard to put it back in the bottle, so to speak,” Rehwaldt said.

There were 33 active cases of the virus in the community as of Tuesday, according to the county’s public health data.

The increase means Del Norte County will remain in the red tier of virus restrictions for at least another week. Rehwaldt said the county may have been on track to see a reduction in restrictions, but the recent case increase squandered that possibility.

Still, Rehwaldt said the likely approval of the Pfizer vaccine for use in children 12 and older will provide the county another tool to fight the virus.

“We’re not quite ready in Del Norte to make that jump,” Rehwaldt said. “But that’s all good news because it will allow some other people who might be interested in getting vaccinated, especially the families of those younger folks to get the vaccine out, so that’s good progress for us.”

And the doctor addressed a question from Supervisor Valerie Starkey about the state’s plan to lift COVID-19 restrictions on June 15.

“I know our numbers don’t warrant it, but I would really like to see us, in the next few weeks, transition from orange to yellow, down to so when June 15 hits we’ve had some sort of transition period,” Starkey said.

Rehwaldt said he doesn’t yet know what the transition away from the state’s restriction framework looks like.

“We don’t really know how this looks, come June 15. I think the hope was at the state level that there be sufficient vaccination statewide that it’d become a moot point to have tiers in place, that the protection was built into the fact that enough people have been vaccinated,” Rehwaldt said.

The doctor said vaccinations are surest bet for reducing the spread of the virus.

“The best thing is to just, if you’re sitting on the fence and you think you might want to get a vaccine, don’t wait,” Rehwaldt said. “There’s no advantage to waiting, because the versions of the virus that are in our future are going to be more potent than the ones we have now.”

County health officials are still holding weekly vaccination events on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Del Norte County Fairgrounds. Limited clinics are also available at Smith River Elementary School. Registration is available online at <https://myturn.as.me/schedule.php> or by calling 707-951-6679.

Sutter Health is also offering clinics on Thursdays and Fridays. More information is online at www.sutterhealth.org/coast/for-patients/health-alerts/covid-19-vaccine.

A handful of local pharmacies are also offering vaccines: RiteAid is making appointments online at www.riteaid.com/covid-19, Safeway is making appointments online at www.safeway.com/pharmacy/covid-19.

19.html and Walgreens is making appointments online at www.walgreens.com/findcare/vaccination/covid-19 or by phone at 1-800-WALGREENS.

Walmart is also making vaccine appointments online at www.walmart.com/COVIDvaccine.