

As state prepares to open, Del Norte County remains in red tier

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One week before most COVID restrictions are set to be lifted in California, Del Norte County remained in the red tier of restrictions.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt told the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors that while new cases were still occurring, he is ready for restrictions to be lifted.

"We're looking forward to seeing the tiers go away," Rehwaldt said. "I get the sense the worst of the pandemic is behind us, and hopefully it will stay behind us."

The key to keeping COVID at bay continues to be getting people vaccinated, Rehwaldt said. To help with that, Rehwaldt said Del Norte Public Health recently moved its vaccine program to Snap Nurse. The move extended vaccine clinics at the county fairgrounds to 6:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The clinic will also move to different locations around the county in an effort to reach more people.

"We're going to have them rotate to different locations based on demand, but we anticipate them being in Smith River and Klamath on a regular basis," Rehwaldt said. "Right now, they're offering Moderna, but we think we can start offering split clinics or maybe two vaccines at the same time."

Rehwaldt said the number of people getting vaccinated has slowed, but new people are showing up daily.

"Our clinic volume has not been great," he said. "I think we're close to 17,000 doses, and I think we're getting very close to 60 percent of our seniors vaccinated. We would like to see it be a little higher."

Rehwaldt said there has been some variants seen in Del Norte County. The variants spread easier and are a little more deadly, he said. The good news is the vaccines appear to be effective against the variants.

While community spread has been rare, new cases are being reported.

"It's mostly family," Rehwaldt said. "We have been connected to schools, but that was mostly February and March. There's some connectivity to businesses, but not big at all. The biggest has been out at Pelican Bay (prison), but by our standards it's not real bad."

According to the state, there are 15 active COVID cases linked to employees at the prison, with five reported in the last two weeks.

Again, the key to beating the pandemic is getting enough people vaccinated, Rehwaldt said. With the state expected to lift most restrictions June 15, Rehwaldt said vaccinated people will be able to go without masks almost everywhere.

"We're kind of looking at a future, where for practical purposes, most people aren't going to be masked," Rehwaldt said. "We'll get there. It's going to take a while though."