

Vaccines popular among Del Norte teens

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Interest in the COVID-19 vaccine has continue to slow in Del Norte County — with one key caveat, according to County Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt.

“We still have relatively low numbers of people getting vaccinated. It’s not just us, it’s pretty much across the board with our partners as well,” Rehwaldt told the county’s board of supervisors Tuesday.

But Rehwaldt said county and state officials are working to increase opportunities for young people to get the Pfizer vaccine, which has received federal authorization for use in 12- to 15-year olds.

“There’s been a little bit of interest since Pfizer got here because that enabled some younger folks to get vaccinated, and honestly our biggest interest group right now is teenagers and their parents,” Rehwaldt said.

And the county’s vaccination effort has changed in recent weeks. OptumServe, the company which conducts the county’s testing program, took over the county’s main vaccination site under a state contract.

“We’re not getting out of the vaccination business, but we’re letting the state take over the steady availability at the fairgrounds, which everybody knows about and has been moderately successful,” Rehwaldt said. “We

just have seen a real die-off in interest in the vaccine lately.”

Meanwhile, the county’s virus case rate has remained stubbornly stable with a slow downward trend.

The county’s averaged around two or three new cases of the virus each day in recent weeks, according to Rehwaldt. The doctor noted that number is “still more than we like, but it’s manageable, certainly.”

The county will remain in the red tier of pandemic restrictions for a 16th week, still longer than any other California county. Just 9% of the state’s population, or eight counties, remains in that risk level.

State health officials this week reaffirmed their commitment to remove most COVID-19 restrictions across the state on June 15. That’ll include lifting physical distancing and capacity restrictions, as well as aligning mask guidance with now-loosened CDC rules.

But Rehwaldt said that reopening won’t quite put the pandemic to bed.

“They’re still going to recommend personal protection, as we will, especially for people who are not vaccinated, it’s still not a safe place to be out in the world until you’ve been vaccinated. And we still encourage everybody to think it over and think about getting that shot,” the doctor said.

He pointed to a recent study, which showed that vaccinated Californians have gotten sick or hospitalized or died with the virus at far, far lower rates than unvaccinated individuals.

“That’s a stark difference. I think people need to start understanding that in a real way, and how much a difference it makes to get the vaccines,” Rehwaldt said.

Vaccinations — including with the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine, which is open to anyone 12 and older — in Del Norte County can be scheduled through the state’s MyTurn system online at <https://myturn.ca.gov/>.