

Green: Herd immunity for state possible in 8 weeks

By STEPHANIE SALMONS Hawaii Tribune-Herald | Tuesday, April 27, 2021, 12:05 a.m.



Lt. Gov. Josh Green says herd immunity against COVID-19 in Hawaii could be reached in about eight weeks, provided the rate of vaccinations continues at its current pace.

“There is good demand, although it’s not demand like it was when we first came out of the gate and everyone was dying to get the vaccine,” Green said Monday during a livestream.

According to Green, 96,529 doses were administered statewide in the past seven days, and more than 1.16 million vaccine doses have been administered as of Monday.

"So we're almost at 1.2 million shots, and when we get to 2 million shots, we will essentially have taken care of 1 million people, and that should be herd immunity," Green said. "So, we're making great progress. If we can keep this progress up and keep pushing the vaccine out at this clip of about 100,000 shots a week, in eight weeks or so we could be there."

On recent visits to Hilo and Maui, Green, a Big Island physician, said he witnessed a lot of younger individuals receiving the inoculation.

"So, now we're now seeing 16- and 17-year-olds getting the Pfizer, we're seeing people in their 20s and 30s getting shots, and that's important because we now have a different trend that we've seen. Seventy percent of all (new virus) cases are people under age 50."

Fewer kupuna getting the virus means fewer fatalities and instances of severe illness, he said, but being younger doesn't necessarily preclude one from hospitalization or death.

"We have seen a very clear trend that younger people are making up our hospitalized individuals," Green said.

As of Monday, 45 people were hospitalized across Hawaii.

"In Maui, we had a couple young people in the intensive care unit, one really at death's door," Green said. "When you're seeing a 42-year-old or a 38-year-old get very sick, though it's a lower probability and much more rare, it's still happening.

"So, these are not just statistics, they're people," he continued. "These are

heartbreaking circumstances, but we're not seeing outbreaks like that at our nursing facilities like we saw that one month ... in Hilo."

Green, however, said more cases are arising from community spread, through public gatherings and people being out without masks.

"I think that we're ... really close to the end of the larger number of fatalities from COVID in Hawaii, but we do still have to extinguish the whole thing."

Now that vaccinations are widely available, Green said he expects more people under 50 to get their shots.

"But it can't happen soon enough," he said. "We really need an urgency here because the sooner we knock down the total number of cases, there will be less virus out there to spread. And with less virus, it's kind of a self-perpetuating prophesy. Then we will have more people vaccinated, less virus around, and (it will be) even harder to catch COVID, and the virus will die out. That's how this thing works."

Green urged people to continue wearing masks "until we get through this last bit of COVID."

"The longer we can keep the virus contained while we're vaccinating, the better."

Economists with the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization last week also predicted Hawaii could approach herd immunity from COVID-19 by early July if the rate of vaccinations remains consistent.

However, the DOH last week said that it is unknown exactly what percentage of the community must be vaccinated to reach herd immunity.

"As more contagious variants spread, we likely need more people vaccinated

than first anticipated," a DOH spokesman told the Tribune-Herald at that time. "Our best strategy is to vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible.

"Hawaii's young adults will play an important role in whether we reach herd immunity, and how quickly."

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