

COVID Update February 12, 2021

With the expansion of the age of those eligible for vaccine lowered to 65 in SC, there are now 1.29 million citizens eligible for the vaccine in the state. As of Wednesday, 970,250 vaccines had been received in SC, and 548,214 of them administered, according to DHEC. Nationally, more than 62 million vaccine doses have been distributed in the U.S. and about 43.2 million have been administered, according to the CDC. Currently, 1.4 million doses of vaccine are being administered daily. The weekly allocation of vaccine to states will increase to 11 million per week. Also, next week, expansion of vaccine to 250 community health centers will be implemented, with a million doses distributed to them. There are over 1300 federally funded community health centers in the country, serving low income and uninsured populations.

Easley City Council members announced Monday that they will consider adding fines to their mask mandate at the next meeting. Pickens County has for the past two months frequently lead the state in COVID per capita cases and deaths.

New 'percent positive' numbers have caused some confusion, which continues. Previously, the percent was reported as people-over-tests, which was incorrect. It was actually people with positive test results, over all people tested. The new number is tests-over-tests, in other words, positive tests divided by all tests done. This is intended to align with the way the CDC has always reported this figure. With the new calculations, percent positive has markedly declined. All previously reported percent positive data were re-calculated and posted on the SC DHEC graphs, but the previous calculations are still available. Just as a frame of reference, the previously reported percent positive rates for the first week of January were over 30%, but with the new method of calculation, are never as high as 20%. Of the 31,266 COVID-19 test results reported to DHEC on Monday Feb 8, 7.0% were positive.

In good news, new cases per day have dropped to almost half what they were at the first of the year, in the country and in the state. Globally, cases dropped 17% last week.

A new home diagnostic test (Ellume) that does not require sending to a lab has been approved. It gives results in 15 minutes, costs about \$30, requires a mid-nasal turbinate (deeper than nasal nostril) swab, and also requires a smartphone with bluetooth to provide results from the test's analyzer and report them to public health, as required. It is 100% specific in someone with symptoms, but the sensitivity is only around 80%, so in someone with symptoms, if negative, a PCR should be done. Its false positive rate is also fairly high in patients without symptoms. So, if the results are a surprise (negative in someone with symptoms, positive in someone without symptoms) a follow up PCR is recommended.

The WHO concluded their investigation of the origin of Sars-CoV-2 by stating that there was no evidence the virus escaped a Wuhan virology lab, or that it originated in a country other than China. The exact origin is unclear, in part due to lack of transparency and cooperation from Chinese officials, but it appears the Wuhan wildlife marketplace was the location where the virus began spreading rapidly.

The CDC reported on Thursday results of a study showing that double masking (wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask) was more effective than wearing either alone, but did not recommend that practice officially. A previously reported study showed that wearing a stocking over a single mask, to snug the single mask edges against the face, was also more effective than the single mask alone. The focus remains on encouraging routine wearing of a well-fitting mask, as half of Americans still do not do so when in close contact with non-family members.

About 1 in 3 Americans say they either definitely won't or probably won't receive the COVID vaccine due to doubts about safety and effectiveness. A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that while 67% of Americans plan to get vaccinated or have already done so, 15% are certain they won't and 17% say probably not.

The CDC on Thursday changed its guidelines to state that COVID vaccinated individuals do NOT need to quarantine after a COVID exposure.

On Thursday it was reported that two-thirds of Americans still believe that returning to a pre-COVID-19 life represents a moderate or large risk, according to an Axios-Ipsos poll. That's the lowest percentage since October. One in three Americans, 34%, now know someone who has died from COVID-19, according to the survey.