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**Department of Health Provides COVID-19 Update, Highlights PA's Transition Toward Endemic**

**Harrisburg, PA** - Acting Secretary of Health Keara Klinepeter provided an update on the commonwealth's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and highlighted preparations being made to continue protecting public health, as the commonwealth transitions toward the endemic stage of COVID-19.

"Pennsylvania continues to address the evolving challenges created by the global COVID-19 pandemic," Klinepeter said during a news conference today. "Over the past year, tens of millions of vaccinations and booster doses were administered to save lives and mitigate the spread of disease. COVID-19 isn't going away. But Pennsylvania is well-positioned with the tools, knowledge, and resources to prioritize prevention in everyday life and manage outbreaks when they occur."

As of this week, Pennsylvania vaccine providers have administered 22,030,656 COVID-19 vaccines according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 76 percent of people ages 18 and older are fully vaccinated; and 95 percent of residents ages 18 and older received at least one vaccination.

"Vaccinations remain our best defense against this virus, and it is great to see thousands of residents stepping forward each day to get vaccinated," Klinepeter said. "That's why we are prepared to move beyond the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to continued vaccinations, we know that the key to our transition will be a strong public health infrastructure that can support our needs as we move to the next phase of our response and recovery."

During the recent omicron surge the Wolf Administration acted swiftly to support Pennsylvanians and the health care workforce by deploying both state and federal support systems to hospitals and long-term care facilities while simultaneously expanding the testing network along with vaccine and booster outreach.

The Wolf Administration led the bipartisan effort to identify immediate investments to support the health care workforce in Pennsylvania which led to the quick appropriation of \$250 million in federal funding, including:

- \$100 million to all acute care, critical access, and children's hospitals licensed by the Department of Health on a per-bed basis.
- \$110 million to high-Medical Assistance hospitals, designated Critical Access Hospitals, and inpatient residential behavioral health facilities.

- \$15 million to quadruple funds available for the [nurse loan forgiveness program](#) at Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.
- \$25 million to support Pennsylvania's emergency management services (EMS) companies.

"Pennsylvania is prepared for a transition toward endemic," Klinepeter said. "We have all learned valuable lessons from this pandemic. That's why Pennsylvania built a strategic stockpile of PPE, supported a robust testing infrastructure that includes testing for schools and long-term care facilities, made critical investments in our hospitals and health care workforce, and executed a successful vaccination rollout."

Today, vaccines and therapeutic treatments are widely available across the state. Businesses, schools, and residents now have the tools and knowledge they need to move beyond the current phase of COVID-19.

"Moving forward does not mean ignoring COVID-19," Klinepeter said. "We have the knowledge and tools needed to make smart decisions guided by public health research to keep ourselves and our communities safer. Our strategy includes a continued focus on prevention while being nimble enough to quickly respond to any changes in the COVID-19 landscape."

In the past year, Pennsylvania's strategic response to COVID-19 has included initiatives such as:

- Continuing to raise vaccination rates and encourage boosters through awareness campaigns, including targeting hard-to-reach communities.
- Organizing support for health care workers, hospitals and long-term care facilities as needed.
- Maintaining a stockpile of PPE.
- Supporting no-cost COVID-19 testing sites in communities.
- Helping K-12 school districts and school-age families maintain in-person learning by continuing to provide weekly COVID-19 testing services at no cost to participating schools.
- Educating counties, municipalities, and health systems about the federal reimbursement available to them for eligible COVID-related expenses.
- Providing funding to grassroots organizations for vaccine outreach efforts, to enable them to serve as trusted messengers in vaccine-hesitant communities to provide information that the COVID-19 vaccine is a safe and effective way to protect themselves and their loved ones from the virus.
- Coordinating with federal and private partners to enable timely, broad access to therapeutics that reduce the risk of severe disease.

"Moving forward, the Department of Health will continue to prioritize the safety of all residents and public health initiatives that increase opportunities for all Pennsylvanians," Klinepeter said.

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Mark O'Neill, [ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov](mailto:ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov)

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