

PROTECT
PUBLIC HEALTH

REVIVE
THE ECONOMY

STRENGTHEN
OUR COMMUNITY

CAPITOL CONNECTION

OCTOBER 2021

From the governor: Vaccinations, testing to save lives

What will it take for more people to get vaccinated against COVID-19? The answer seems to be at the grassroots — from local folks talking to friends and family about the risks of infection to community leaders calling for people to get vaccinated NOW. Sure, masks and physical distancing can help. Testing helps. But vaccination offers the best protection for those eligible and to protect everyone around us — especially our keiki. It's our kuleana to bring case counts down, Hawai'i. As more people are realizing, it's a public health issue, not a political one.

Q. What is the latest outlook for our COVID-19 case counts?

A. We're looking for a significant downward trend, as well as lower daily case counts. That's why we need everyone's help in this fight, and people are responding. The state Department of Health is working with community groups to expand testing and vaccination in hardest-hit areas. Native Hawaiian and church leaders have stepped up to help. A large percentage of state and county workers as well as business employees have been vaccinated. Restaurant owners and customers are following the new requirements, and **more than 216,000 people have registered for our new SMART Health Card**. Over Labor Day, we had more enforcement and fewer large gatherings, so people seem to be getting the message that we have to protect each other.

Q. Where do we stand on hospitalizations and available patient beds?

A. The hospitalizations have fallen a little, but we're not out of the woods yet. **The trigger really is the number of intensive care unit patients we can handle.** Our healthcare staff is exhausted. That's why we've deployed more than 600 healthcare workers from out-of-state to hospitals across the islands. That's also why we're working so hard to keep people out of the hospitals with our mandates, vaccination campaigns and testing, as well as better therapeutics. So far, none of our hospitals have had to invoke a "crisis standard of care" plan. We want to avoid that worst-case scenario of having to make tough decisions about patient treatment.

Q. Why are we not implementing stricter measures, like shutdowns or requiring post-testing of travelers?

A. There won't be a full-scale shutdown because the mayors and I realize there's a lot of COVID fatigue. We're trying to not penalize those who are already vaccinated or hurt local businesses and their employees, who are just starting to get back on their feet. The majority of our population — more than 66% — have been fully vaccinated and have been doing what we've asked of them. **As for traveler post-testing**, the challenge would be keeping up with demand. In recent weeks, we've averaged 9,000 to 10,000 tests a day because of employment requirements and people concerned they've been infected. We don't want to take away testing capacity from those who need it locally.

Q. Why was Hawai'i's participation in the September 2021 World Conservation Congress so important?

A. The pandemic has shown us how connected we are as a global community. The warning signs of climate change are all around us with more wildfires and sea level rise. We were the first state to host this international event in 2016 and became an example for the world in fighting climate change through our **Sustainable Hawai'i Initiative**. We were able to show how our island communities are working together to preserve our environmental and cultural connections. It's important that communities large and small be willing to advocate for what they believe in because that can encourage others to do the same.



COVID-19 Hospitalizations

September 23, 2021



94 Hospitalized
12 Fully Vaccinated | 82 Not Vaccinated



24 in the ICU
3 Fully Vaccinated | 21 Not Vaccinated

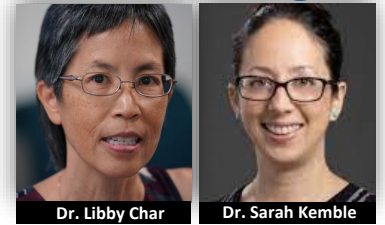


21 on Ventilators
2 Fully Vaccinated | 19 Not Vaccinated

(top) Governor Ige announces launch of the SMART Health card. As Queen's Medical Center Facebook posts show, unvaccinated people in the hospital far outnumber those vaccinated.

DOH provides latest updates in the COVID-19 fight

If daily headlines have left you concerned and confused, here are some excerpts and additional information from a Sept. 15 legislative briefing by Dr. Libby Char and Dr. Sarah Kemble of the state Department of Health (DOH) to answer some of your questions. To see the briefing, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVEDQFuneWE>.



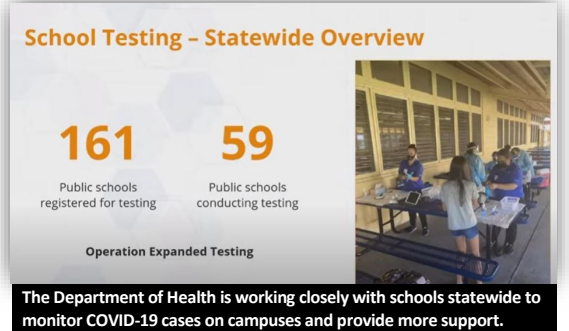
Two-thirds of Hawai'i's people are already vaccinated.

Community hospital status, oxygen supply and outreach –

“Our hospitals are still at very high capacity,” said Dr. Char, but Hawai'i's oxygen supply has stabilized. “Also, we have more than quadrupled the amount of testing we're doing in the state. We're trying to pair testing and vaccination with community health to answer people's questions. It doesn't mean everybody is going to get vaccinated, but at least we know we're providing factual information. Public health education should be back in the community. That's where we want to be.”

Hawai'i Crisis Standards of Care plan – The plan, considered a “living document that can be updated,” was created in 2020 by a group of Hawai'i's leading medical experts, along with kūpuna, persons with disabilities, and community members. “We hope we never, ever get in a situation where we have to use this, but the thought was, ‘We should do this ahead of time, to have a logical, reasonable, compassionate and fair way if it gets down to the point where we can't meet everybody's needs,’” said Dr. Char. . . . We absolutely do not want to play God.” (Noted in the plan: “Advanced age was rejected as a primary triage criterion because it discriminates against the elderly. Age already factors indirectly into any criteria that assess the overall health of an individual.) For details, including an appeals process and other COVID-19 “tie-breaker” factors, go to <https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/files/2021/09/Hawaii-Crisis-Standards-of-Care-Triage-Allocation-Plan-and-FAQs.pdf>.

Operation Expanded Testing and other COVID-related school services – Dr. Kemble described working closely with public, private and charter schools statewide to provide an integrated COVID-19 response on the campuses. This includes regular K-12 testing, hiring more public health nurses for schools, and expanding case and cluster investigation teams. “Through **Operation Expanded Testing**, we have **161 public schools registered so far for testing and 59 schools already conducting tests. (An additional 13 charter schools have started testing.)** This program allows schools to receive test kits, administer those tests on campuses, send them in for results and get those results back to the students, staff and schools so they can take action. The results are reported to DOH through electronic laboratory reporting.”



Monoclonal antibody therapy – “It's a treatment that provides a temporary boost of immunity for people who are at high risk of having a really bad outcome from COVID. If we give it to you early on (before hospitalization), it can prevent you from getting really sick. It's not a panacea, but it can prevent you from dying or being hospitalized,” said Dr. Char. According to the FDA, the therapy is not a substitute for vaccination and needs to be administered within the first 10 days of symptom onset.

Third doses versus boosters – “Currently, the FDA has approved a third dose of vaccines for those who are immunocompromised because of other medical conditions,” said Dr. Char. She explained a third dose helps these individuals get the full protection others get from two doses of the vaccine. Also, since Dr. Char's briefing, the FDA and the CDC have recommended authorization of a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine for people 65 years and older and individuals age 18 to 64 who are at high risk of severe COVID-19.

SMART Health Card launched, along with other measures



So far, more than **216,000 people** have signed up for the new state-issued digital **SMART Health Card**, unveiled by Governor Ige last month. “Participation is purely voluntary, but it makes it easier for patrons to present proof of vaccination at restaurants, gyms and other businesses that require it,” he said. “It's another step toward protecting our residents and visitors, while also supporting local businesses and Hawai'i's economy.” The card also helps prevent the use of fake vaccination cards because businesses will be able to scan the QR code using a verification app. Anyone who has been fully vaccinated in Hawai'i has the choice of using the new SMART Health Card, the original vaccination card or an image of the card when asked. To obtain the SMART Health Card, go to Hawai'i Safe Travels at <https://travel.hawaii.gov> and create an account or use your existing account.

More proof of vaccination or testing status required - Governor Ige has signed an executive order requiring contractors and visitors at state facilities to provide their vaccination or testing status prior to entry. Some county mayors have also announced similar precautions through programs such as **Safe Access O'ahu**, which requires proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test within the past 48 hours to enter restaurants, bars, indoor gyms, and recreational settings. **Maui County's Safer Outside** program also will require proof of vaccination for indoor dining, but a negative test result isn't an option. Those under 12 years old are exempt from the program.

Mythbusting in the pandemic and our kuleana

We've all heard the bizarre tales being spread over social media about COVID-19 vaccines — from microchips being implanted to people becoming magnetic — along with other rumors. That's why Dr. Keawe Kaholokula, as chair of Native Hawaiian Health at UH Mānoa's John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM), worked with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs recently to publish "**Mythbusting 10 Fears and Rumors about COVID Vaccination,**" a list that takes a common-sense approach to vaccine hesitancy. His article is part of a special section in OHA's Ka Wai Ola at <https://kawaiola.news/category/covid-19/> to encourage people to get informed and vaccinated.



Dr. Keawe Kaholokula from the UH medical school and Native Hawaiian leadership speak out.

In the "**Mythbusters**" list, he urges people to talk to their family doctor, medical professionals or other credible sources rather than believing Internet trolls. "Definitely, the misinformation over social media is creating confusion and fueling people's fears. But it's bigger than that. It's a mistrust of government," he explained. "**COVID-19 has really been an eye-opener for us in many ways**, shining a light on health and social inequities. I remind people that as much as we've had issues in the past, government is also here to protect us. Government didn't create these vaccines. They were created by the same companies who developed medication for diabetes and heart disease — drugs people are already taking. Government's role is to make sure all people have access to the vaccines free of charge." **With the Delta variant surge**, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Filipino populations are showing higher numbers of COVID-19 cases — along with lower vaccination rates — according to Department of Health data. That concern led to an **Aug. 26 news conference where leaders urged their lāhui (nation) to become informed and get vaccinated**. "Many of our people are vulnerable to COVID because of pre-existing conditions," Dr. Kaholokula explained. "We also may be essential workers with jobs that place us at risk and live in multi-generational households. If we did get COVID, we would be at higher risk for severe symptoms, hospitalizations and death."

As a clinical psychologist, Dr. Kaholokula draws on his professional training when he's talking to vaccine skeptics. "People are tired of being told what to do. I don't blame them; they're frustrated. But it's causing a rift in our community," he said. "We know it's not helpful to challenge or nag people if that makes them defensive and stronger in their position. Rather, I try to give people a chance to be heard and provide them with factual information so they can make up their own minds. I also say, at the very least, we have to help contain this virus by wearing our masks, physically distancing and avoid gathering." **What would he say to people who demonstrate with signs of "My body, my choice"?** "Individual rights are fine, but when it infringes on the safety of others, it becomes an issue," said Dr. Kaholokula. "You're forcing your choice on everyone you come in contact with. We have laws to regulate behavior that puts other people in danger. Also, if hospital beds are full, we cannot take care of everyone. Our healthcare workers are going to have to make critical, life and death decisions about who gets care and who doesn't. Let's not put our healthcare providers in that terrible situation."

The 20 leaders at the Aug. 26 news conference — kumu hula, educators, health care professionals and public officials — drew parallels to smallpox epidemics and other foreign diseases that have devastated the Hawaiian community. They cited future **Queen Lili'uokalani's decisive action**, including a strict quarantine in 1881, to stop the spread of a smallpox epidemic in the kingdom. "What has made Hawai'i special is we have this unique culture, this aloha spirit, we're diverse, we got along," Dr. Kaholokula said. "I wonder what happened in this pandemic? What we're seeing is counter to all those things we've come to think about and value about Hawai'i."

Hawai'i's message to the world on climate change

We can create a better world. We just have to make it a priority and work for it." That message drove the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress, Sept. 3-11, in France and underscored why global events like it are so important. We've heard the dire warnings before, but natural disasters over the past few months have made climate change more real than ever. "The nation and the world are in peril," said President Joe Biden after seeing the devastation from Hurricane Ida. "That's not hyperbole. That is a fact."

Governor Ige addressed the IUCN remotely — an event last held in 2016 when Hawai'i was the host. He stressed how islands are on the frontlines of climate change. "The culture of conservation that permeates our indigenous values and ways of relating to the natural environment are inspiring and driving progress," he said. He described Hawai'i's leadership in improved biosecurity, 30x30 marine and terrestrial conservation, restoring watersheds and native forests, and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and committing to 100% renewable energy. **Representatives from Hawai'i's community-based conservation groups, cultural practitioners and the state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR)** attended the event in person or virtually. "Hawai'i brings a unique and powerful message to the world — of close conservation and culture connections, ambitious goals and strong partnerships and collaboration to implement them — with aloha as the overarching value," said **DLNR director Suzanne Case**.



Members of Hawai'i's delegation at the IUCN conference.

Grassroots efforts provide hope on many fronts

People helping people. If the pandemic has left you wondering whether we still care about each other, take heart. These projects show there's still plenty of aloha in the islands and people willing to go the extra mile for others. First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige has been actively involved in three efforts — **Kaukau 4 Keiki, the Alzheimer's Association of Hawai'i and community vaccination clinics** — that have been helping people as we battle COVID-19.



Kaukau 4 Keiki reported impressive results from its summer program to make sure families had the nourishment they needed. Government, private and community partners provided more than 700,000 meals through weekly boxes of groceries for children in rural areas statewide. "Because of KauKau 4 Keiki, our family was able to go to bed well-nourished and not hungry," said one parent. The program also supported Hawai'i farmers by purchasing 469,325 pounds of local produce and investing \$1.5 million back into the state's economy. "I think it really fulfilled a need in the community and highlighted the issue of food insecurity," said Mrs. Ige. She credits coordinators **Dexter Kishida and Sharlene Wong** for bringing all the partners together, with reimbursement coming from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The hope is to repeat the program next year. For details, go to <https://www.kaukau4keiki.org/>.

Mrs. Ige is also honorary chair of the **Walk to End Alzheimer's**, an event on different islands that encourages people to walk in their neighborhoods rather than in large crowds because of the pandemic. She understands the challenges of the disease because her mother, who is 96, suffers from it. "The number of people affected by the disease is quite staggering, especially if you include the thousands of people who are caregivers," Mrs. Ige explained. "According to the 2014 Facts and Figures report from the Association, women in their 60s are about twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's as they are to develop breast cancer, and that two-thirds of Alzheimer's cases are women." To find a "Walk Day" near you in October and November, go to <https://www.alz.org/hawaii>.



Mrs. Ige joins first responders and community leaders in Nānākuli for a vaccination and testing event.

Finally, Mrs. Ige has been visiting **COVID-19 vaccination and testing pop-up clinics**, like the ones last month at **Palama Settlement and Nanakuli Village Center**. Palama Settlement board member **Cedric Yamanaka of Queen's Medical Center** arranged for that mobile clinic. **Patty Kahanamoku-Teruya**, chair of the Nānākuli -Mā'ili Neighborhood Board, coordinated the Nanakuli event with area legislators, Hawai'i Pacific Health, and other community organizations. More pop-up clinics are being planned in the coming months, where vaccination rates have been low. "We wanted to be part of the solution," said Kahanamoku-Teruya, whose whole family is vaccinated. "Our message is 'Mālama Our 'Ohana. It's Our Kuleana.' Too many people are listening to bad information on social media. This is our community taking charge of our future."

Kokua Senior Living affordable project breaks ground

Work has begun on the new 224-unit Kokua Senior Living affordable rental tower on Alakea and S. Beretania streets in downtown Honolulu. The units will be marketed to seniors 55 years and older who have annual household incomes between 30 to 60% of the area median income, with rents beginning at \$634 a month.

"Even with all the focus on the pandemic, we're still making progress on affordable housing," said Governor Ige. "We actually met our goal of 10,000 additional housing units by 2020. Now our new goal is adding 3,000 more new homes by the end of 2022. I'm excited about this project because it's senior housing with a very convenient location. Being rentals, it ensures these will be for local residents, not out-of-state investors."

The state's Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corp. partnered with developers Highridge Costa and Coastal Rim Properties on the project. The project is slated for completion in August 2023 and will seek lottery applications a few months before the tower is completed.



Governor Ige joined representatives from developer Highridge Costa and the state's Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corp. to kick off the Kokua project for seniors. The governor said the project is part of the state's continuing commitment to support affordable housing, especially at the most challenging levels for low-income households.

Photo by Gordon Pang/HHFDC
Rendering: Highridge Costa



Contact Us: Executive Chambers, State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Phone: (808) 586-0034 Fax: (808) 586-0006
Hilo Office (808) 974-6262 | Kona Office (808) 323-4542
Maui Office (808) 243-5798 | Kaua'i Office (808) 274-3100

Capitol Connection is a regular e-newsletter that provides you with updates from the fifth floor of the State Capitol. The newsletter is available on-line and via subscription. Check the governor's website at governor.hawaii.gov to subscribe. Also, follow the governor on Twitter and Instagram @govhawaii and <https://www.facebook.com/GovernorDavidIge>.