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Hawai'i Department of Health

COVID-19 TRANSITION PLAN

*From Emergency Response to Public
Health Management*

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Executive Summary

This plan outlines the Hawai'i Department of Health's (DOH) COVID-19 priorities as it transitions from emergency response to disease management. Throughout the pandemic Hawai'i has consistently had one of the lowest per capita COVID-19 case counts and fatality rates. DOH will build on its first two years of pandemic experience to continue protecting the health of Hawai'i's residents and visitors.

Goals



Protect Against & Treat COVID-19

DOH remains alert and prepared. Moving forward, COVID-19 efforts will center on achieving three goals.

Goal One: Protect Against and Treat COVID-19

DOH will remain committed to promoting equitable access to vaccines, testing, and therapeutics, while continuing to provide primary prevention guidance.

- **Vaccines**
Vaccines will remain widely available to all eligible residents and visitors. Mass vaccination clinics will be phased out. Vaccines will be available at pharmacies, health centers, and public and private healthcare providers.
- **Testing**
Testing will shift away from community testing sites. Testing will remain widely available as self-administered home tests and at traditional healthcare sites. Home test kits are widely available through federal distribution, private insurance, Medicaid and Medicare, and are available for retail purchase.
- **Therapeutics**
Therapeutics are available in healthcare settings, by prescription. DOH will support equitable access to therapeutics through measures such as community outreach, linkage to care, and language access assistance.
- **Primary Prevention**
DOH will continue to disseminate guidance on basic preventive measures including use of masks, distancing, ventilation, and staying home when sick. Self-isolation and notification of close



Detect & Prepare For New Variants

contacts will remain essential. Case investigation and contact tracing will continue to focus on high-risk settings.

Goal Two: Detect and Prepare for New Variants

DOH will enhance new variant surveillance and remain ready to implement new approaches to disease control as needed.

- **Surveillance**
DOH will continue monitoring for new variants through clinical, wastewater, and epidemiologic surveillance.
- **Adaptation**
New variants may require new approaches to vaccination, testing, therapeutics, and/or prevention. DOH will closely monitor national and international developments to be prepared to respond to new variants.



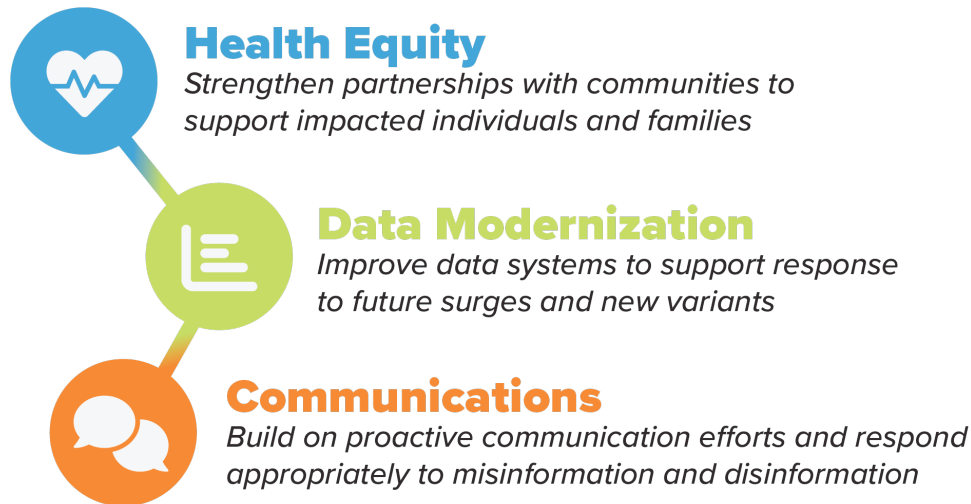
Enhance Community Resilience

Goal Three: Enhance Community Resilience

DOH will collaborate with businesses, schools, and the community to keep workers safe on the job and students safe in the classroom.

- **Economy**
DOH will continue to assess risk and offer guidance to businesses to reduce workplace transmission and reduce risk of spread among customers/clients.
- **Education**
DOH will continue to promote the use of layered mitigation strategies in educational settings and to update its Guidance for K–12 Schools.

Strengthen Organizational Capacity



DOH will support health equity, data modernization, and effective communication.

Health Equity

COVID-19 disproportionately affects Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos among others. Addressing these inequities is a priority for DOH. This will be done through enhanced training and deployment of community health workers and attention to deepening relationships with communities and community-based organizations.

Data Modernization

Data modernization requires ongoing resources, partnerships with healthcare, businesses, and state leadership, and adaptability to the changing data landscape. This work is off to a strong start with Electronic Lab Reporting, the Hawai'i Immunization Registry, and the Electronic Disease Surveillance System.

Communications

Communications are a critical component of public health emergency response. DOH strives to be timely, accurate, and credible in its communications, including providing public information in multiple languages and in accessible formats.

Introduction

The DOH COVID-19 Transition Plan charts a path from emergency response to disease management. This transition does not mark the end of the public health response. The world will not eliminate COVID-19 in the foreseeable future. New variants and additional surges are likely.

The Transition Plan focuses on three key goals: protect, prepare, and enhance, and on strengthening three organizational capacities: health equity, data modernization, and communications.

Recent experience with the Delta and Omicron surges highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring of disease trends and response readiness.

Purpose

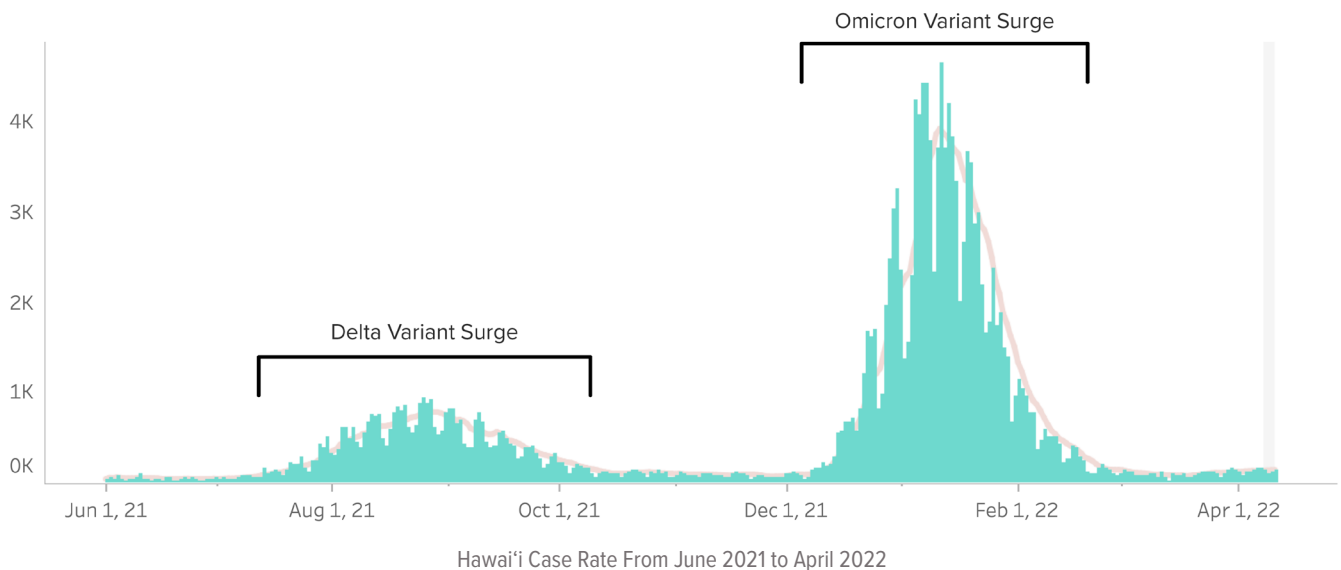
This plan is a strategic look at how DOH will transition its COVID-19 pandemic operations from emergency response to disease management.

Objective

This plan describes how DOH will build on the experiences and lessons learned in the first two years of the pandemic to prepare for future variants, disease surges, or a new pandemic. By doing so, DOH will continue protecting the health of Hawai'i's residents and visitors.

Hawaii-Specific Considerations

DOH must address challenges unique to Hawai'i. These include fragile transportation logistics and supply chains related to being an isolated island state. Counties with differing needs, separated by ocean waters and managed by a centralized health department amplify these challenges. Cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity must be considered in order to provide equitable access to resources, services, and information. DOH continues to take these considerations into account as it prepares for future events.





Goal One: Protect Against and Treat COVID-19



Vaccinations



Testing



Therapeutics



Primary
Prevention

DOH will continue to make [public health resources](#) available and accessible to Hawai'i's residents and visitors. This requires continued collaboration between Federal and State agencies, healthcare systems and providers, and private and public entities including community organizations. These coordinated efforts will produce [COVID-19 resources](#) and services such as vaccinations, testing, and therapeutics, as well as information about the importance of primary prevention measures including masks, distancing, and staying home when sick. DOH will continue to support community-led vaccination and testing initiatives for underserved communities. Vaccination efforts will transition to traditional healthcare settings while testing efforts will transition to self-testing with over-the-counter (OTC) kits and testing in healthcare settings.

For underserved and marginalized communities, DOH continues to support community-led initiatives for vaccinations and testing as part of its health equity efforts.

Vaccines

Vaccination remains the best protection from COVID-19 related severe illness and death. Booster vaccinations add significant protection.

Although Hawai'i has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country, a significant portion of the population remains unvaccinated or has yet to receive a COVID-19 booster.

To achieve higher vaccination rates, it is important to continue to correct misinformation about vaccination, fill information and educational gaps through in-language and culturally appropriate engagement, and remove barriers to vaccination. It is equally important to promote access and uptake of boosters among those who are eligible but have not yet received them—especially kupuna and others at high risk of severe disease.

To promote vaccine access for unvaccinated and under-vaccinated (non-boosted) individuals, DOH continues to utilize its vaccine and case rate data, the DOH Health Equity Index (developed based on CDC's Social Vulnerability Index), and feedback from community-based organizations and other stakeholders.



DOH will continue efforts to facilitate COVID-19 vaccine availability in a wide variety of healthcare settings, including pharmacies, primary care offices, and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC).¹

To prepare for potential surges in vaccine demand, DOH will continue to coordinate with healthcare providers and systems to maintain sufficient capacity.

DOH continues to collaborate with partners to educate and update providers on the COVID-19 vaccine. Clear and consistent messaging from trusted sources is paramount to maintain the community's confidence in Hawai'i's vaccination efforts.

Testing

Testing will continue to transition away from large community testing sites to a combination of at-home self-tests and testing in traditional healthcare settings. Over-the-counter (OTC) tests, also known as at-home or self-tests, are currently available for free via the Federal direct-mail program.² Occasionally, DOH, FQHCs, community-based organizations, and County Partners distribute OTC tests at community sites. OTC tests are available for purchase at retail establishments. Private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid may continue to provide test kits or reimbursement for OTC test kits.³

1 <https://www.hawaii-pca.net/health-centers-here-for-you>

2 Individuals can purchase OTC tests at retail outlets and online. U.S. residents can request four at-home tests from <https://www.covidtests.gov/>.

3 Reimbursements are contingent upon Federal mandates. The Uninsured Program stopped accepting claims due to a lack of sufficient funds. <https://www.hrsa.gov/coviduninsuredclaim>

Diagnostic tests are available in clinical settings such as provider offices, urgent care clinics, emergency departments, and hospitals. These are generally polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and rapid antigen tests that commercial clinical laboratories process. Some pharmacies also offer COVID-19 testing. Clinical labs report all results electronically to DOH in accordance with national and state reporting requirements. In-state clinical laboratory testing capacity and availability are robust and are anticipated to be able to meet testing demand in future surges.

Therapeutics

Acute COVID-19

DOH and the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i (HAH) will continue to manage Federally provided therapeutics for treating acute COVID-19.⁴ DOH will continue to work with HAH to assist hospitals and respond to requests for resources needed for future surges.

DOH is focused on facilitating timely and equitable access to appropriate therapeutics for high-risk individuals. This requires coordination with healthcare providers and healthcare systems to distribute supplies equitably throughout the State. Equitable access requires culturally and linguistically appropriate community outreach to promote acceptance of available therapeutics and prompt access to providers.⁵

Long Covid

Long COVID is characterized by persistent variable symptoms after acute COVID-19 illness.⁶ Understanding of long COVID is evolving. DOH will support equitable access to therapeutics for long COVID, as these become available. DOH will highlight the Federal government's long COVID resource web page and the State's hotline to assist patients in finding information about disability eligibility and health insurance coverage for long COVID.⁷

Mental and Behavioral Health

DOH recognizes the impact COVID-19 has had on mental and behavioral health. It will continue to coordinate community-wide behavioral health resources, access, and information through the Hawai'i CARES line. (808-832-3100 or toll-free 800-753-6879)

Primary Prevention⁸

DOH will continue to provide in-language and culturally appropriate guidance to individuals, businesses, and organizations on topics including use of masks, distancing, ventilation, and staying home when sick. Self-isolation of those diagnosed with COVID-19, notification of one's close contacts, and testing and symptom monitoring for close contacts are integral components of prevention.

Case investigation and contact tracing will continue to focus on settings and groups at increased risk, including congregate settings, long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, homeless shelters, schools,⁹ daycare, and healthcare settings. Within these settings, DOH will provide guidance for isolation, quarantine, testing, vaccination, and other preventive measures, as well as promote access to therapeutics.

4 <https://www.hah.org/covid19>

5 <https://Hawaiiicovid19.com/covid-19-treatment/>

6 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects/index.html>

7 <https://www.usa.gov/#tpcs>

8 https://www.cdc.gov/pictureofamerica/pdfs/picture_of_america_prevention.pdf

9 <https://health.Hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/resources/school-guidance/>



Goal Two: Detect and Prepare for New Variants

Surveillance

DOH surveillance will classify variants and identify new variants by conducting Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS). WGS is the process of identifying the genetic makeup of a virus.

Early identification and classification of variants is essential to Hawai'i's COVID-19 response. DOH will continue working with private, local, State, and Federal partners to perform sequencing on two sample types: individual clinical samples and wastewater samples.

Epidemiologic surveillance will continue and will inform the response to new variants.

Clinical Samples

DOH sequences selected clinical specimens from all Counties and islands and will continue to evaluate sources of specimens for WGS to ensure the results are representative of communities throughout Hawai'i. DOH publishes these results in its periodic Variant Report.

Wastewater Samples

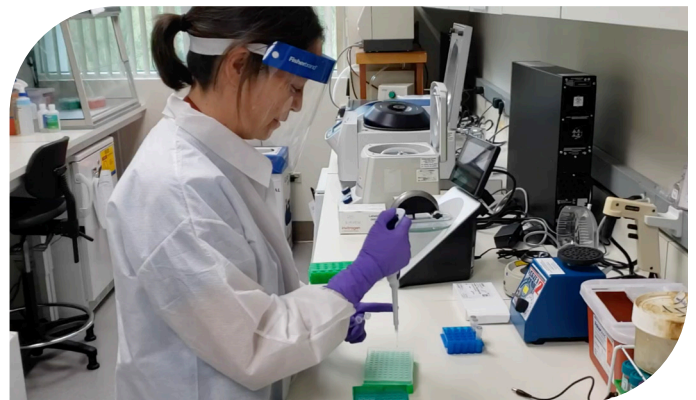
Wastewater sampling is a promising COVID-19 monitoring method. Through this method, DOH collects samples from wastewater (sewer) systems and determines the amount and type (variants) of COVID-19 virus in the sample. Wastewater testing can be a valuable tool in early detection by identifying variants in a community and serving as a signal of an upcoming surge.

As of April 2022, DOH sends wastewater samples to an out-of-state lab for testing and is preparing to perform testing in-state. DOH will continue to develop its wastewater surveillance capabilities. DOH is a member of the CDC's National Wastewater

Surveillance System (NWSS).¹⁰ For communities that submit data, the NWSS displays COVID-19 trend analysis on the [CDC's COVID Data Tracker](#). DOH will submit data to NWSS.

Epidemiologic Surveillance

DOH will continue COVID-19 surveillance and data collection, including regular assessment and public dissemination of case counts, epidemic curves, positivity rates, geographic distribution, race/ethnicity data disaggregation, hospitalizations and deaths. DOH is working to establish new technologies to enhance surveillance for COVID-19 and other diseases in Hawai'i, such as syndromic surveillance and electronic initial case reporting. These systems will help DOH to detect the impact of COVID-19, new variants, other respiratory illnesses, or other health threats on communities and healthcare systems, and enable policymakers to take appropriate action as early as possible.



Whole Genome Sequencing is Performed at the State Laboratory

¹⁰ CDC developed the NWSS to coordinate and build the nation's capacity to track the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in wastewater samples collected across the country. NWSS works with health departments to track SARS-CoV-2 levels in wastewater so communities can act quickly to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Public Health Management of New Variants

As new variants emerge globally, DOH will continue to assess risk using available data about transmissibility, disease severity, protection offered by vaccines or prior infection, effectiveness of therapeutics, effectiveness of mitigation measures, and reliability of available tests. DOH will assess and monitor the percentage of statewide cases resulting from the new variants and the rate at which the variant proportion is rising. DOH will evaluate the impact on total case rates statewide, hospitalizations, and mortality.

Working with Federal, State, and County leadership, healthcare partners, and community partners, DOH will implement appropriate response and containment measures statewide.

Adapt Disease Control Strategies

DOH and COVID-19 vaccination providers may need to rapidly initiate new vaccination efforts if the CDC recommends a newly formulated vaccine and/or a new round of boosters. DOH will coordinate vaccine allocation and provide public messaging to support vaccination providers.

A new variant will likely increase demand for testing. DOH will initially work to increase the availability of OTC tests and expand healthcare-associated testing. There may be a need to resume large scale

community testing sites. The ability to do so will depend on having sufficient Federal and State resources.

Additional preventive measures and/or therapeutics may be needed to respond to specific characteristics of a new variant. There will be unknowns in the early stages of managing a new variant, as there were in the early stages of managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal, State, and Local agencies will make decisions based on the best available scientific information, and DOH will adjust and modify response efforts in accordance with new information as it emerges. DOH communications will be timely, accurate, and credible.

Emergency Supplies and Personnel

Hawai'i has experienced shortages of PPE, supplies, and trained personnel during pandemic surges. DOH and healthcare partners will continue to support efforts to acquire adequate and timely supplies, PPE, and supplemental staffing, and to facilitate their equitable distribution. As a result of the experience of the last two years, there is a pool of Hawai'i residents trained to perform critical public health functions, ranging from case investigation to data entry. Acquiring and mobilizing emergency supplies and personnel will require adequate Federal and State resources.





Goal Three: Enhance Community Resilience

DOH will continue to enhance community resilience by providing COVID-19 mitigation guidance for settings such as workplaces, sporting events, gatherings, restaurants, bars, and schools. These efforts help keep businesses open and students in school.

Supporting Efforts to Maintain a Strong Economy

Businesses are advised to take proactive measures to protect their workforces and ensure continuity of operations. DOH will continue to assess risks and recommend measures to protect workers using the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommendations as a guide.

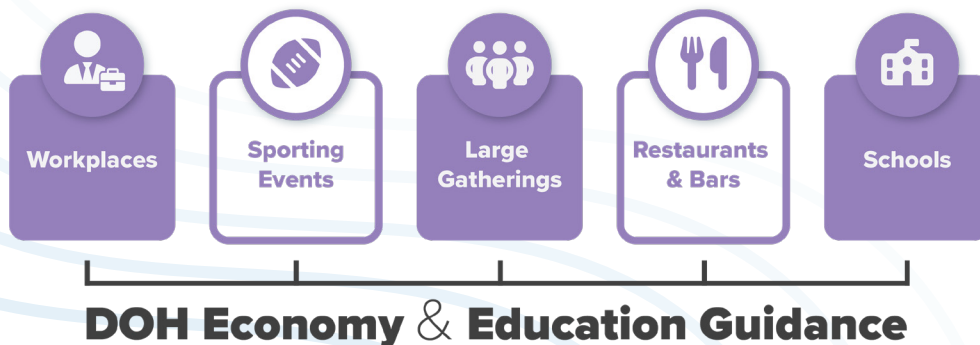
Workplace Disease Mitigation Strategies

DOH continues to recommend steps to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and community settings. Examples include encouraging mask-wearing, vaccinations, and boosters. Policies such as paid sick leave or paid time-off for vaccinations can help prevent the spread of disease.

Improving indoor air quality and ventilation decreases COVID-19 transmission. DOH will collaborate with partner organizations to distribute national guidance on indoor air quality standards and ventilation. DOH will support efforts to improve ventilation and air filtration in schools, childcare facilities, businesses, and public buildings.

DOH will continue to use social media, newsletters, and DOH websites to post guidance and share best practices/lessons learned for businesses and organizations to use for planning and policy development.

DOH will continue to provide guidance to policymakers to assist with State and County level decision-making on measures such as gathering size or occupancy limits, mask mandates, physical distancing, and restrictions on events and venues such as arenas, theaters, sports, concerts, bars, or indoor restaurant dining.



Mitigation Strategies For Schools

Effective Techniques to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19

Supporting Efforts to Maintain Safe In-Person Education

Keeping schools open for in-person learning is a priority. DOH will continue to promote the use of layered mitigation strategies in educational settings and will regularly update its [Guidance for K-12 Schools](#). DOH and DOE have continuously reassessed and adapted these strategies over the last two years and will continue to do so.

DOH will continue to promote COVID-19 vaccinations for students, teachers, and staff. DOH will encourage schools to develop and adapt testing strategies for maximum impact on disease detection and control.

DOH will continue to monitor case rates and clusters in schools and provide guidance to schools regarding potential need for improved mitigation efforts and/or restriction of school programs in order to control transmission.



Promote student and staff vaccination



Stay home when sick



Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette



Proper and consistent mask usage



Screening and diagnostic testing



Improve ventilation and air filtration



'Ohana bubbles or cohorting



Cleaning and disinfection



Physical distancing

Strengthening Organizational Capacity

Focusing on Health Equity

The [DOH COVID-19 Health Equity Report](#) demonstrates that COVID-19 disproportionately affects Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, among others.¹¹ Addressing these inequities is a priority. DOH will continue working with stakeholders to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on underserved populations and to support equitable access to resources, implementing key lessons learned from the COVID-19 response.

DOH will lead efforts to improve community access to linguistically and culturally appropriate information, guidance, and linkage to services.

DOH is working to enhance the training and deployment of community health workers, who will strengthen efforts to reduce health inequities in diverse communities. This work includes collaboration with the University of Hawai'i System to provide a statewide community health workers certificate training program, with a focus on recruiting diverse student cohorts.

DOH will continue to deepen its relationships with community members and community organizations. It will continue monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on disproportionately affected communities providing access and directing resources to populations most in need.



11 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7037a1.html>

Data Modernization

DOH has undertaken a comprehensive data modernization initiative. The goal of data modernization is to develop interoperable systems that allow timely, secure, and confidential data sharing among appropriate partners. This includes basic health and disease data, and the collection of relevant information related to health equity measures such as race, ethnicity, and language.

The Hawai'i Immunization Registry, Electronic Lab Reporting and Hawai'i's Electronic Disease Surveillance System are examples of data modernization efforts already under way. Continued progress on data modernization will require ongoing resources; partnerships with healthcare, businesses, and state leadership; and adaptability to the changing data landscape.

Benefits of Data Modernization

Accelerates and facilitates data analysis

Facilitates sharing accurate and timely info with public

Improves sharing of info with internal/ external partners & researchers

Increases electronic data transmission with providers

Communications

Communications are a critical component of public health emergency response and disease management. DOH strives to be timely, accurate, and credible in its communications. DOH will continue to build on the communication capabilities it has developed over the last two years, including providing public information in multiple languages and in accessible formats.

DOH will communicate with the community as COVID-19 disease management evolves. This includes continuing to provide public data about case rates, vaccinations, and deaths. It includes providing up-to-date information about variants, vaccine recommendations, testing, therapeutics, and preventive measures.

Communications will continue to be shared through multiple channels including DOH websites, social media platforms, radio, television, print, trusted messengers, and traditional news outlets. Relationships with community-based organizations, schools, and language access services will help amplify and further disseminate DOH messages.

DOH will continue to combat misinformation and disinformation by sharing accurate, credible, accessible, science-based educational materials to allow the public to make informed decisions.



Social Media Posts in Multiple Languages Inform Diverse Communities

Conclusion

For more than two years, DOH has worked tirelessly with its stakeholders and with the support of the community to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hawai'i's current COVID-19 situation is promising, but new variants and new surges are expected.

DOH will continue to follow the science and to adjust recommendations, policy guidance, and procedures as the COVID-19 landscape evolves.

It is impossible to predict how COVID-19 will impact Hawai'i in the future. Through collective effort and investing in public health infrastructure and preparedness, Hawai'i can respond appropriately to COVID-19 as it transitions from emergency response to disease management.



Acronyms

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DOE	Hawaii Department of Education
DOH	Hawaii Department of Health
FQHC	Federally Qualified Health Center
HAH	Healthcare Association of Hawaii
HPCA	Hawaii Primary Care Association
HRSA	Health Resources and Services Administration
NWSS	National Wastewater Surveillance System
OTC	Over-The-Counter
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
U.S.	United States
WGS	Whole Genome Sequencing

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CDC Prevention- [picture_of_america_prevention.pdf](#) (cdc.gov)

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