

# Dr. Tharp: Action needed now to slow Delta variant

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As more is learned about the Delta variant of COVID-19, Dr. Stephen Tharp, the Clinton County Health Officer, urges county residents to get vaccinated and renew practices such as masking and social-distancing.

“What we have learned about it is that it (the Delta variant) is much more infectious than our previous variants,” Dr. Tharp said. “That means that we are seeing more people catch this when we have a case that pops up, and they are able to spread it much farther along as well.”



According to Dr. Tharp, those traits change the math in terms of what it would take to reach a level of herd immunity.

“One of the very important things to understand is, when we started working with this, we told people that if we could get 75 to 80 percent vaccinated, we could probably stop this because we could prevent enough infection that it would start to die out,” he said. “The fact is, with this variant, that is no longer the case. With the Delta being much more infectious, we would need to

have 90 or 95 percent to reach a level of immunity that would allow us to relax... What we are trying to do now is convince everybody that they need to get a vaccine so that, if they do get the illness, they would have so little of a chance of being so sick that they would be in the hospital or die. This is the thing to understand.

“The second thing is that, as a protective measure, wearing masks anytime you are out is the best way to prevent you from catching the virus or being exposed to the virus,” Dr. Tharp added. “I would encourage people to wear masks anytime they are out of the house.”

Dr. Tharp says that encouraging these measures is all he can do since Senate Enrolled Act 5 stripped powers from local health departments.

“We are in a situation with the state legislature,” Dr. Tharp said. “After the bill they passed this late spring, we really can’t mandate that people do these things. So, it is up to the schools to decide and to private individuals to decide when it is bad enough. Every entity has the right to say, ‘You can’t come in here if you don’t have a mask.’ Those are the tools that we have.

“I do not really want to be in a position to tell people that they have to do something,” he added. “In fact, the state legislature has made it difficult for me to do that. But, if we don’t do that, we will be messing with this for four or five years, and we are going to lose a lot of people. A lot of people are going to be long-term sick because we didn’t handle this when we had a chance. That is where we are.”

As of Aug. 5, Clinton County had a vaccination rate of 45.5 percent, raking 39th out of the 92 counties.

“There are pockets of the county that are very low, and there are other pockets that are very high,” Dr. Tharp said. “As an average, it is less than 50 percent, and in a lot of cases it is way less. That is just not adequate. We are not going to be able to go back to a normal lifestyle or a normal economy until we get everyone vaccinated. The Delta makes people so much sicker that we will be in a world of trouble. We are going to stay in this condition until we all agree to do what is necessary to stop it. We have the tools. We just don’t have the will.”