

School personnel feel relief after receiving first Moderna vaccine

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FREMONT - Rose Pemberton enters Terra State's Student Activities Center with a grin under her mask.

The Otis Elementary cafeteria manager was motioned to a line where she was set to receive her first dose of the Moderna vaccine during Wednesday's school vaccination clinic at the community college's campus.

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Other school staff from the various Sandusky County school districts followed behind as they were directed towards one of eight lines where nurses were awaiting their arrival with a fresh vaccine in hand.

"It's been a rough year," Pemberton said.

Although she received the vaccine and will get the second dose in four weeks, Pemberton said she will still wear a mask and be as safe as she can with a goal of being able to see her family more frequently as the vaccine rolls out.

More than 1,000 vaccinated

By the end of the day Wednesday, more than 1,000 teachers, cooks, administrators, bus drivers and school staff from Sandusky County had received their first COVID-19 vaccination.

But the lead up to Wednesday's mass inoculation clinic was not always smooth as the COVID-19 pandemic closed down schools last March and forced many districts to either use hybrid models with classes both in-person and online, or offer students an entire year of learning virtually.

Had the vaccine been rolled out in December, Lesly Blanton, a 10th grade guidance counselor at Ross High School, said she may not have gotten it, thinking the scientific testing for the vaccine seemed rushed. But her view has changed.

"I know we are having our students come in and I wanted to be safe and keep the kids safe so I definitely wanted to get vaccinated," Blanton said.

As she read up, Blanton said getting the vaccine was on the top of her to-do list, knowing she and other faculty would be safe, allowing for full-time in-person learning at Fremont City Schools.

"When they first talked about the vaccine, probably in December, I was a little hesitant," Blanton said. "I knew I was probably going to get the vaccine but I didn't want to be in the first wave."

Now feels vaccine is safe

As she read more about the vaccine, the science behind it and how effective it was, she felt safe getting inoculated.

With this first step, Blanton said she feels "relief" and glad that things can start getting back to normal at the school.



Jon Detwiler, Fremont City Schools superintendent, said Wednesday was an "exciting" day after a "dark year," knowing that he and he staff will be inoculated Wednesday and then in another four weeks as the district plans to open March 1 with a hybrid four-day-per-week model and then invite students back to full-time learning beginning March 22.

"I'm very appreciative that the governor recognized how important it is to get students back into school," Detwiler said.

School districts that committed to at least a hybrid learning model were moved to the front of the line for vaccinations as the rollout for the general public is still for those in the 65-years-and over age range and for those with pre-existing health conditions.

Grateful for Terra partnership

Bethany Brown, Sandusky County Public Health commissioner, said her department's partnership with Terra State has been invaluable as the Student Activities Center hosted the vaccination clinic.

She said people have to wait a required 15 minutes after the shot to determine if they have an allergic reaction to the vaccine. Although there were inevitably some delays, she said Wednesday that the clinic was running smoothly, with those receiving the vaccine coming in groups of around 20 or so at a time.

Wednesday's clinic also gave nursing students at Terra State Community College such as Alexis Wise a chance to get real world experience during a pandemic, something many nurses with decades of experience cannot say they have.

Wise said it felt great to tell her first patient Wednesday that they had their first COVID-19 vaccine while being able to experience a first for herself: administering a vaccine during a pandemic.

Overseeing Wise Wednesday was Terrie Hopkins, coordinator of Terra State's medical assisting and phlebotomy certificate, to ensure the other nursing students were treating each patient correctly.

"I get to watch them grow now and actually be part of that," Hopkins said.

Real-world experience

Although nursing students at Terra are trained well, Hopkins said there is nothing better than getting real-world experience rather than practicing on mannequins.

"We just simulate in the classroom, we don't really do live situations," Hopkins said. "Most of the time you don't get that real patient care, so this is awesome. This year, I feel great about sending these students out into the field, because I know that they can handle anything."



Already back in session, Samantha King, a social studies teacher at Vanguard Career Center in Fremont was ready for the vaccine, knowing how much of a struggle it has been dealing with the pandemic and the uncertainty of in-person learning.

"Last year was pretty rough for us," King said of the trade school. "They're hands-on learners. And I'm a hands-on learner."

King said she does not like change but was thankful the school was able to organize and combat the issues the pandemic caused for trade schools such as Vanguard and other districts that have only ever known in-person learning.

Misses in-person classes

"I love teaching, I love my profession and I love going to work every day so when you're not at work every day it kind of makes you sad," King said.

Being with her students made King realize how much she and other staff took for granted being able to see her students each day during the school year.

With the vaccine, King said the school year, although more than half over, has turned out better than the bleak outlook many had for schools in August.

In recent weeks, signs are showing of a slowdown in the spread of the virus as Sandusky County has gone from seeing around 60 cases per day to less than half now as more people are staying safe and getting vaccinated.

Brown said the county is still receiving between 100 to 200 vaccines each week as they try and vaccinate locals as fast as they get the supplies.

Similar to swine flu vaccinations

She said there are similarities to H1N1 (swine flu) vaccinations in which the health department had one day of around 3,000 vaccines doled out. One of the biggest differences is having those vaccinated for COVID-19 wait the additional 15 minutes to ensure they do not have an allergic reaction to the vaccine.

The Ohio Department of Health estimates there have been 4,723 total cases of COVID-19 in Sandusky County, with 93 deaths reported, 319 requiring hospitalization and 4,433 presumed to have recovered from the virus.

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