

Hawaii Starts COVID-19 Vaccination Program

As we head into 2021, there is growing optimism that the Hawaii economy will recover if we can continue to contain COVID-19 in Hawaii. So far, the state has administered roughly 137,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and expects to reach 250,000 doses by mid-February. I look forward to the day that vaccinated travelers will be able to fly freely without a negative pre-test.

Like most states, the first groups to get vaccinated in Hawaii were the frontline healthcare workers, first responders and the elderly or disabled living in care homes (Phase 1a). Currently underway is the next priority group (Phase 1b) and includes seniors living in the community who are 75 and up along with a long list of essential workers, including teachers, childcare support as well as workers in critical industries, such as energy. Phase 1c is scheduled to begin in March and will include residents 65 and over, those at risk of severe symptoms of COVID-19 and other essential workers. Phases 2 and 3 include members of the general population and will start this summer.

Hawaii Tourism "Re-Boot"

After being shut down to tourism in Hawaii for over 6 months, the State reopened to domestic trans-pacific travelers as of October 15th. Last December, roughly 236,000 visitors arrived in Hawaii. However, this is down about 75% from December of the previous year.

Oahu remains in Tier 2 of a 4-tiered reopening plan - group gatherings are limited to 5 non-household members, and restaurants and retail shops must reduce their capacity to 25% or 50% depending on the type of business. The new Honolulu Mayor has signaled he hopes to relax restrictions in mid-February, such as re-opening bars and allowing youth sports to resume. Of course, the Governor must approve these changes. The Lt. Governor (an emergency room physician) has also expressed a willingness to relax restrictions as well. Let's hope they do.

COVID-19 Counts Low but Hawaii Economy Remains Crippled

Not unlike other states, Hawaii saw a spike in new COVID-19 cases in January due to social gatherings during the Christmas and New Year holidays. Fortunately, we are now seeing reduced new case counts, which could help us move to Tier 3. On February 1, the state reported 82 new coronavirus infections statewide, with a 7-day average of 70 new daily cases, and a 7-day average positivity rate of 2.6%, bringing the total number of cases since the start of the pandemic to 25,853, with 410 deaths due to COVID-19. As you can see, Hawaii has one of the lowest COVID-19 case rates and lowest transmission rates of any state in the nation.

Legislative Session 2021 – "Money Grab" Continues

The Hawaii legislative session opened its session on January 20, 2021 but remains closed to the public. Hearings will all be virtual. Despite Hawaii facing historic revenue shortfalls, Governor Ige proposed no new taxes in his State of the State speech. This was consistent with the Governor's package of bills introduced, with the one exception of a new fee to be imposed on sellers of sugary drinks. Local businesses applauded the governor's decision to forego proposing tax hikes.

So far, however, the state legislature has ignored the Governor's plea, and has introduced dozens of bills calling for tax hikes in income, corporate income, capital gains, conveyance, general excise, gas taxes and more. This is a money grab, pure and simple, ignoring that Hawaii already has among the highest taxes in the nation.

Other bills introduced relate to renewable energy, climate change and carbon taxes, EV mandates and the planned phase out of fossil fuel vehicles, increases to minimum wage, restrictions on tobacco products and e-cigs, and further restrictions to retail store sales and liquor laws. I especially like the bill that prohibits businesses that sell age restricted products (like alcohol) to require proof of your age if you look old. I wish all the bills used common sense like that!

Upcoming Event - HPMA Golf Tournament at Oahu Country Club on March 15, 2021

Hope to see you at the HPMA golf tournament on March 15, 2021. The venue remains at Oahu Country Club, a private members only club, which was founded over 100 years ago. Known as the “Grand Dame” of Hawaii golf courses, it’s bordered by a lush forest on three sides, and an ocean view on the fourth side. As usual, we will have great prizes, and delicious 19th hole lunch and drinks.

Hope to see you all there!

What You Need to Know About Getting to Hawai‘i.

If you are planning to join us for the HPMA golf tournament, and need to travel to the Hawaiian Islands, it is important that you’re aware of the current entry requirements prior to your travel, as required by the State of Hawai‘i Safe Travels program. Currently, all travelers must be tested by a state approved testing partner (<https://hawaiicovid19.com/travel-partners/>) within 72 hours of departure and have a negative COVID-19 test result BEFORE beginning their trip to Hawai‘i. You are also required to create an online account with the state, upload the negative test result to the safe travel website and get a QR code (<https://travel.hawaii.gov/#/>). Travelers arriving WITHOUT a confirmed negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of departure and the QR code prior to travel are subject to a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

Since a lot can change between now and March 15th, please visit <https://hawaiicovid19.com/travel> for the latest details.