

State health officer touts vaccines for children 12 to 15

By Leah Willingham
JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The coronavirus vaccine is now available for children ages 12 to 15 in Mississippi for the first time, a development the state’s top health official told residents he hopes will “shake us out of our complacency” in battling COVID-19.

“I want us all to really sit back and realize that you’re

likely either to get the COVID vaccine, or the COVID virus,” State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said Thursday during a virtual briefing with the Department of Health. “And under every circumstance, under every conceivable scenario, you are a thousand-fold, if not a million-fold better off getting the vaccine than contracting COVID.”

The announcement means more than 160,000 residents between the ages of 12 and 15 are now eligible for shots. The vaccine will be available for adolescents under 16 at sites that administer Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine.

The state is starting their vaccinations of that age group Friday, and some private doctor’s offices are already offering shots to children. Parents must accompany minors to the vaccination site and sign a consent form to allow their child to get a shot.

U.S. regulators earlier this week expanded the use of Pfizer’s vaccine to children

as young as 12. The Food and Drug Administration declared that the Pfizer vaccine is safe and offers strong protection for younger teens based on testing of more than 2,000 U.S. volunteers ages 12 to 15. The agency noted there were no cases of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared with 16 among kids given dummy shots.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Paul Byers said the pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of Mississippi’s young people. Getting kids vaccinated will help facilitate a return to normalcy when it comes to school, socializing and extracurriculars — activities that are important to kids’ social and emotional growth.

“Now is our opportunity to

really get to do things with more normalcy,” Byers said. Preventing the spread of coronavirus among the state’s younger residents will be a priority in the coming months, Mississippi health officials said.

Byers said the Department of Health is starting an initiative with funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to do on-site coronavirus test in schools. The program will be voluntary for schools to opt into and schools will likely need to get a parent’s consent before testing their child.

Increased testing and vaccinations will make attending school overall safer, officials say. Around 52% of Mississippians said they would get their children vaccinated in a survey of 11,000

residents conducted by the Department of Health. Around 22,000 kids in the 12 to 17 age group in Mississippi have had coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. At least one has died, according to officials.

As of Thursday, May 13, close to 851,000 people in Mississippi are fully vaccinated. The state has a population of around 3 million. The number of weekly vaccinations in the state has been slowly dropping since a peak of 132,042 shots in late February. Just under 46,500 shots were given out last week in Mississippi.

Mississippi revenue collections are on record pace

Mississippi Today
by Bobby Harrison
Mississippi revenue collections through April are on near-record pace for the largest percentage year over year increase in the modern era.

Through 10 months of the fiscal year, the state has collected \$5.35 billion in general fund revenue — a \$756.9 million or 16.5% increase over the amount collected during the same time period last year, according to the April revenue report recently released by the Legislative Budget Committee staff.

Factors surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could be playing a strong role in the revenue collections. Those factors include:

►►Unprecedented federal assistance to individuals and to Mississippi governmental entities. For instance, during the current fiscal year, most Mississippians have received at least \$3,200 in federal stimulus checks that economists say have helped fuel the state economy.

the economy, rebuilding in the aftermath of a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, tax cuts or tax increases or even circumstances surrounding a pandemic.

“Revenues continue to be good. We are grateful for that... This has allowed us to fund what cuts we made last year,” House Speaker Philip Gunn, R-Clinton, said earlier this year.

There are two key numbers to assess in the monthly Budget Committee revenue reports. One is how revenue collections look year over year, which is generally viewed as an economic indicator. The second is whether revenue collections are meeting the official estimate, which is the number the Legislature used in making its budget. If collections do not meet the estimate, the governor or Legislature could be forced to make mid-year budget cuts.

For the month of April, collections continue to be strong — \$212.1 million or 28.5% above the estimate. For the year, collections are 17.7% or \$804.2 million above the estimate. Much of the excess money will be directed to the Capital Expense Fund at the end of the fiscal year. Money in that fund often is used by legislators to fund various projects throughout the state.

Not surprisingly, most sources of state revenue have increased significantly year over year. Sales tax revenue, the largest single source of state revenue, is \$124.2 or 8% above the amount collected during the same time period last year while use tax revenue, which is essentially the sales tax levied on internet purchases, is up \$75 million or 28.5% year over year. Income tax collections are up \$291.1 million or 20.1%, but that includes the revenue that was collected after the tax filing deadline was pushed back to July.

Casino revenue collections have been strong during the pandemic, up \$204 million or 20.2%.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED AD VALOREM TAX EFFORT HOLMES COUNTY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Holmes County Consolidated School District will hold a public hearing on its proposed school district budget for the fiscal year 2021-2022 on **June 3, 2021 at 5:00 pm** at the Holmes County Consolidated School District Central Office, 313 Olive Street, Lexington, MS. The Holmes County Consolidated School District is now operating with a projected total revenue budget of \$37,242,224.36. Of that amount 17.89 percent or \$6,661,444.00 of such revenue is obtained through ad valorem taxes. For the next fiscal year, the proposed budget has a total projected revenue of \$32,590,335.37. Of that amount, 18.72 percent or \$6,099,862 is proposed to be financed through a total ad valorem tax levy.

For the next fiscal year, the proposed increase in ad valorem tax effort by Holmes County Consolidated School District may result in an increase in the ad valorem tax millage rate. Ad valorem taxes are paid on homes, automobile tags, business fixtures and equipment and rental real property.

Any citizen of the Holmes County Consolidated School District is invited to attend this public hearing on the proposed ad valorem tax effort, and will be allowed to speak for a reasonable amount of time and offer tangible evidence before any vote is taken.

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