Gov Scott Comments:

- We still maintain one of the lowest rates of hospitalization and death
- But it continues to spread, especially among the unvaccinated
- Let me emphasize if you are unvaccinated, you will get COVID and you are 30x more likely to be hospitalized
- Unvaccinated adults are undermining our ability to protect our health care system capacity
  - Unvaccinated are 5% of adult population in VT but 75% of the hospitalized; at times up to 90% in the ICU
- Some want to reinstate mandates that will impact everybody more than 20 months into the pandemic, while we approach 90% of the population having at least one dose
- But vast majority of Vermonters have stepped up and done the right thing
- Most states, including those with Democratic governors are not putting in place more restrictions
- The problem is being driven by less than 5% of the population – unvaccinated adults who have chosen not to get vaccinated
- The rest of Vermonters should not be punished
- VT became one of the first to implement vaccine or test/mask for state employees
- Have encouraged other employers to implement this model
- His team will meet with other employers to encourage vaccine mandates in other settings where transmission is likely to occur
- In addition restaurants, bars and clubs are places where masking mandate wouldn’t be as effective
- 18-29 year olds have a lower vaccine rate
- Vaccine or test requirement will help keep employees at work and healthy and prevent spread
- Also doing work to secure 10s of thousands of rapid tests
- Stepping up efforts to get more boosters into arms – launching a booster campaign similar to aggressive approach with vaccines a year ago

Commissioner Mike Pieciak (DFR):

- Cases
  - Cases down 15% in VT – stood out in comparison to New England, seeing cases still increase
  - Testing was down 10% so some decrease could be attributed to this – but still highest testing in the country
  - Positivity rate also down slightly so seems to be true decrease in cases
  - 5.1x greater likelihood of contracting if unvaccinated
  - 30x more likely to be hospitalized if not fully vaccinated vs those vaccinated and boosted
  - 34x more likely to die if not fully vaccinated vs those fully vaccinated and boosted
  - Tomorrow marks 1 year anniversary of first vaccine being administered in VT: 930 lives have been saved due to the vaccine
Cases are lowest in those 65+
- Seeing some improvement in worst hit counties, like Bennington
- Not anticipating cases to go down over next 4 weeks; expect cases to rise after holiday gatherings
- Do everything you can to prevent transmissions over the holidays
- 104 cases on campuses last week – many attributable to Middlebury outbreak
- LTC cases down – 29 last week

- Hospitalization
  - Some improvement in hospitalizations – flat rate, slight decline in ICU cases
  - Relatively flat hospital availability, slight increase in ICU beds, but still need to be cautious - low availability
  - At 20 deaths for the month – higher number of unvaccinated
- VT just under 50% of 5-11; 25% fully vaccinated

Secretary French (Education)
- Vaccination – most important measure we can take
  - 12 and older – more than 75% now fully vaccinated – now encouraging all 16-17 year olds to get a booster
  - Vaccination is the key to making school operations more stable – high schools are operating continuously
  - Will see more stability at the elementary level with vaccination, especially starting mid-Jan
  - Impact will be uneven around the state based on vaccination rates – working on plans to support schools with lower vaccination rates
- Test to stay
  - 20-30% more schools join test to stay each week
  - Last week over 5000 test to state tests run
  - Data indicates 0.9% positivity rate among students and staff; a few schools higher around 5-6%
  - Allows to focus with more precision
  - Expanded to public pre-k last week, working on child care and private pre-k
  - Some tests close to expiring – encouraging schools to run more antigen tests as approach holidays for kids signed up for surveillance testing
- Masking
  - Set to mid-January to reassess after holiday vacation
  - Recommendation continues to involve – will be reviewing

Secretary Smith
- Boosters: 46% of those 18+ have received a booster
- 51% of 5-11 have received first dose or scheduled
- EMS teams to boost capacity for monoclonal antibody delivery and to respond to outbreaks at LTC
- FEMA teams arriving to help boost hospital capacity
- 80 subacute beds opened, 39 more beds at 3 LTC facilities under agreement, 19 online
Notes from December 14th, 2021 Press Conference

- 5 more ICU beds at UVMMC, 2 at Northwestern VT, 1 at SVMC – trying to get to goal of 10 more
- Vermonters have a choice but choices have consequences – choice of not to get vaccinated is impacting those who have done everything right
- Hospital reporting: making a change as it was including those COVID positive patients at Brattleboro retreat – but they are not getting hospitalized because of COVID – will now be treated like a congregate living facility for reporting purposes
- Middlebury college – set up 4 more testing locations & distributed 400 rapid tests

Mark Levine
- Remember basic precautions before holiday gatherings: have the talk about who is vaccinated, keep it small, consider masking when not eating, have a strategy for testing – get tested before you gather
- If rapid testing – 1 test a few days before, 1 test day of gathering
- If you have any symptoms, even mild, stay home
- Plan to test 5-7 days after gathering, even if fully vaccinated and asymptomatic
- Need for booster is even more important with Omicron – looks like 3 vaccines are much more effective
- Rate of break through cases is higher with Omicron but do not look more likely to have bad outcomes if you have a booster
- Omicron has now been found in all border states and Canada
- Continuing surveillance of samples and Burlington waste water
- Last week message for unvaccinated was to get tested as soon as any symptoms because monoclonal antibodies need to be administered soon
- This week, look at the data about hospital and ICU risk

Questions and Answers

Q: when Omicron arrives – and seems like it will – will that change your mind on masking? It seems more transmissible. Scott: we are seeing reports that it is more transmissible but not as severe, we will continue to reevaluate and make those decisions to protect Vermonters
Q: when you say 5% unvaccinated Vermonters are having impact on 95% - how many Vermonters is this? Scott: around 40,000. A: what more can be done? Should there be harder steps? Scott: we’ve seen some restaurants make vaccinated mandatory or you can’t go in, these are steps in the right direction; would like to see more businesses implement vaccination or testing and masking
Q: what can we do to increase boosters? Scott: people think they are fully vaccinated though data is showing they have waned – we need to be more direct and get this message out – more of a messaging campaign, we have ideas on how to do this – more to come in days ahead
Q: have you put thought into whether you will run again next year? Scott: focused on COVID, budget and state of the state address but it is on his mind, will say more after those addresses
Q: how is supply of the rapid tests? Will there be enough? Sec Smith: 10000 LAMP and 50,000 antigen – should be here in time for the holidays – this week and next – as well as ongoing PCR testing
Q: are we going to start showing more data on cases by vaccine and boosted status? Scott: data on age of people in the hospital and vaccination/booster status can really help driving decision making; Pieciak – we are now providing data on cases and hospitalization based on fully vaccinated and booster – charts
shown past few weeks at press conferences; Levine – currently have around 2% breakthrough case rate but what really matters is you are more protected from serious outcomes
Q: for those who refuse to get vaccinated should we “hit them where it hurts” and charge more for hospitalization? Scott: we haven’t talked about that – but something to consider – trying to work on education and information
Q: have there been resignations or discipline over state employee vaccination rule? Scott: dept of human resources will get data on this
Q: you have been lumping masking with other mitigation measures like lockdowns or gathering limitations – are they the same? Scott: legislative letter mentions other mitigation; and we know if mask mandates don’t work they might move on to other measures like distancing and business closures
Q: how do we take pressure off of our health care system that is “fighting the good fit” for almost 2 years with delta alive and well and omicron on the way? Scott: we are well aware and doing all we can to alleviate the pressure; Smith: doing what we can to relieve pressure though state testing, state vaccination, more staffing – until we can work on long term workforce needs
Q: how close are we to endemic not pandemic? Mark Levine: would have said March before omicron, now it could be before or after that depending on how quickly it spreads
Q: how close are we going to a pharmacy and get antigen test paid for? Pieciak: making progress on getting PBMs and pharmacies online to do this – getting in place – hoping very shortly especially with BCBSVT – hoping all before the holidays