

Gov. Scott press conference transcript June 14, 2021

Gov. Phil Scott on Monday, June 14, 2021, announced that 80.2% of Vermont's eligible population — those age 12 and older — have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, making it the first state to reach this major milestone.

Governor Scott also announced he has rescinded all state COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, Vermont's State of Emergency, slated to expire on June 15, will not be renewed ([click here for additional details](#)).

Below is a transcript of Governor Scott's remarks, delivered at a press conference Monday:

Governor Scott: Good morning. 464 days ago, on March 7, I was at a Norwich Hockey game when I learned we had our first case of COVID-19 in Vermont. I got up from my seat and headed into the office, ready to take on this challenge. We had spent weeks leading up to that moment learning everything we could about this new virus and preparing for what seemed to be the inevitable.

A day later, we stood at the Emergency Operations Center to announce that the global pandemic had reached our doorstep.

Since then, we've had 145 briefings — many with difficult news and hard choices, others offering reason for hope and confidence in brighter days ahead. Always telling you what we knew, what we didn't know, what actions we were taking and why.

There is no doubt each of us — every single Vermonter — has been through a lot in the last 15 months. Missing time with family and friends; adapting to restrictions; putting off weddings, birthday parties, holidays and travel; working and learning from home. Or worse: losing loved ones, businesses or jobs.

For 15 months, our daily lives have been impacted by a global, once-in-a-century crisis that required us to do things we never thought we'd have to do. Never did I think I'd be the Governor ordering businesses to close, sending kids home from school or telling people to stay home to stay safe.

I think back to the early days, calling the Vice President because we didn't have enough test kits to get us through the week. Chasing a lead from Congressman Welch and cold calling someone I had never met at 10 o'clock on a Friday night, in hopes of getting enough PPE for our health care workers.

There was also a time when — based on what we'd seen in other states — we thought we were going to need refrigerated trailers because hospital morgues might not be able to handle what was coming.

Although we have faced heartbreaking losses, we are fortunate these types of measures weren't needed. And that's only because of the unity of the people of Vermont, whose commitment to neighbors and community never wavered.

At the beginning, I told you we would face, find and fight this virus together. That's exactly what Vermonters have done and continue to do. And you've done it better than any other place in the country. I also believe we've done it as well as, or better than, any other place in the world.

Together, we built a nation-leading response that kept people safe. Vermont has had among the highest testing, and lowest hospitalizations in the country. We have had the fewest deaths and cases per capita in the continental United States. And keep in mind, this is even after we ended *Stay Home, Stay Safe* and restarted our economy to put people back to work and kids back in school.

Alongside the Legislature and with the strong support of our Congressional Delegation, we also worked to protect those who were hit hardest, providing financial help for individuals, small businesses, laid-off workers and so much more.

We've also built a vaccination program that Vermonters have made the very best there is — without offering financial incentives, other than the occasional maple creemee.

Which brings me to why we're here this morning. Today, I'm very proud to announce that Vermont has now become the first state in the nation to vaccinate 80% of its 12 and over population.

In a fair comparison to President Biden's goal of 70% of Americans over the age of 18 by July 4, Vermont has vaccinated 81.8% of 18+.

We said from the very start, and in the face of criticism, that our vaccine strategy would prove to be the most effective in the nation. That in order to protect the most vulnerable, a simple-to-understand and easy-to-implement age-banded strategy would deliver the best results. Again, not only do we lead the United States, but Vermont is now a global leader in vaccinations to defeat COVID-19.

Our state has shown the world what's possible when you have a group of people with the right attitude following the data and trusting medical science.

Now here's the news many have been waiting to hear and I've been waiting to deliver for 15 months.

Now that we have hit 80%, as promised, [effective immediately I'm lifting all remaining state pandemic restrictions](#) and the State of Emergency will formally end at midnight June 15.

And here's why: Because it's safe to do so and it's safe because Vermonters have done their part to keep the virus from spreading and stepping up to get vaccinated. In fact, no state in the nation is in a better position to do this than we are.

So, to be clear, here's what this change means and it's really pretty simple: There are no longer any State COVID-19 restrictions. None.

Unless there is a federal requirement in place, like for public transportation or long-term care facilities, employers, municipalities and individuals can operate under the same conditions as before the pandemic.

I know most Vermonters have been anxiously awaiting this moment. But I also know there are some who might feel uncomfortable or who have their own legitimate reasons to remain cautious. As I've said, that's natural and it's okay.

I hope all Vermonters show compassion and respect for everyone, including businesses choosing to keep some requirements in place, while they wait for all their employees to do the right thing and get vaccinated.

But I want everyone to understand, we are able to remove restrictions because they are no longer needed to prevent the surge in COVID hospitalizations or deaths we have been concerned about. And like every decision throughout this pandemic, it was made with support of our top public health experts, Dr. Levine and Dr. Kelso.

It's important to note, that even as we celebrate this milestone our work isn't done. We will continue to vaccinate as many Vermonters as we can.

Because every shot given today, tomorrow, and in the weeks to come is just as important as the ones we administered yesterday.

And when vaccines are approved for younger Vermonters in the months ahead, we'll be ready.

Vermont's success has been a team effort across the state. Each one of us knows people who have gone above and beyond.

This list is long, so I'm reluctant to share individual thanks for fear of missing too many. But I do want to mention some, starting with the incredible work of our frontline teams: from contact tracers to the epi team, State Emergency Operations Center staff, everyone on our HOC-SEOC crew, and all those who had to turn their full-time attention to the response. Over the last 15 months, I've been briefed 236 times by the joint SEOC and Health Operations Center, which includes hundreds of people from across the state.

The Vermont National Guard has also been there for us, whether it's vaccinations, food distribution, building and maintaining medical surge sites or anything we have asked of them — they have been there ready willing and able.

And on the vaccine front, the Guard was joined by so many partners across the state, including EMS crews, hospitals and other providers, pharmacies, schools, businesses, community groups and more.

I also want to thank our legislature and the congressional delegation for their support. Without Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Congressman Welch, we would not have had the resources we needed for our response, and the recovery to come.

Here in the room today we have some of the members of my COVID-19 Leadership Response Team – none of our success would have been possible without them.

From the very beginning, this has been “all hands-on deck” and we have broken down silos and gotten creative. For example, when I appointed Mike Pieciak as commissioner of Financial Regulation back in 2017, I don't think he was expecting to develop modeling for a global pandemic. But he and his team at DFR have done remarkable work.

And then there's our Restart Teams: Secretary Kurrle, Commissioner Schirling, Secretary Moore, Secretary French and all the volunteer business, community and education partners who helped guide our reopening efforts.

Our seasoned leaders at AHS, Secretary Smith, Deputy Secretary Samuelson, and their entire team, as well as Secretary Young at the Agency of Administration. And the list goes on, from Digital Services to VTrans and Public Service, to Labor and Ag, BGS, Tax and Libraries. Every single agency and department has had a role to play.

The staff in my office have also quietly but effectively helped to keep everyone informed and fielded all the requests for help. They have been essential to keeping all of this together and our team focused and accountable, as has my Cabinet and their teams, who have kept state government fully operational, even while they took on the additional responsibilities of this pandemic.

And then of course there is Dr. Levine and our State Epidemiologist Dr. Kelso and their teams, whose advice and guidance we have relied on from the start, whose thoughtfulness, hard work and dedication are like none I have ever seen.

I know we don't intentionally take people for granted. But I have to say, Vermonters are fortunate to have all these public servants leading this response. And as Governor, I am very blessed to have a team with so much character, commitment, competence and chemistry.

Fate can have a funny way of putting the right people in the right place at the right time and I think that is exactly what happened here.

I also want to thank members of the press: the broadcasters who carry these briefings live, all the journalists from across the state who've called in. You have kept Vermonters informed, and you held our feet to the fire.

We don't always love your questions, but we are not supposed to. Your focus on transparency and accountability has made our response better and Vermonters are better off for it.

But at the end of the day, the people who deserve the credit most are everyday Vermonters – those who wake up each morning wanting to do the right thing.

Vermonters met this difficult moment from the start. You have cared for one another, you have followed the science, and you have put others first. You stuck together, even while we had to be physically separated.

We have been united in our commitment our sense of duty and our care and respect for one another.

The ingenuity, creativity and dedication of all Vermonters — to their friends and families, to their neighbors, and to their communities — has been incredible and we should all be very proud. I know I am.

Through it all, we have shown the nation — and much of the world — how to respond when there is no playbook, and how to do it with civility and respect.

But this is no surprise to me and should be no surprise to anyone who knows anything about what it means to be a Vermonter.

On the first day of the Battle in Gettysburg, General Sedgwick knew enough about our character and courage to send the order” “Put the Vermonters ahead.”

157 years later, we again showed that when the nation is in need of leadership and hope; when America needs to find its path forward to solve problems and help people; when in dark times, our country needs a state to light the way; Vermonters will *always* step forward and lead the charge.

I thank all of you for what you have done over the last year and a half and the work we will do together to recover stronger than ever before. We have still got a lot of work to do, so let's keep moving Vermont Forward.