

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

November 18, 2020 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers*

Wendy Davis, MD, FAAP, Vermont Child Health Improvement Program, UVM
Breena Holmes, MD, FAAP, Physician Advisor, Maternal & Child Health, Vermont Department of Health (VDH), VCHIP Senior Faculty

VDH Updates: COVID-19 Cases in VT K-12 Learning Communities (While Infectious)

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: According to the COVID-19 in Vermont K-12 Learning Communities while Infectious dashboard (linked here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/COVID19-Transmission-Schools.pdf>), there were 19 cases reported in the past seven days for a total of 74 cases. The College and University dashboard (linked here: <https://dfr.vermont.gov/about-us/covid-19/school-reopening>) show the St. Michael's College outbreak (part of ice sports) is up to a total of 79 cases as of 11/16/20. UVM has a total of 71 cumulative cases as of 11/15/20.

News to Support Keeping Schools Open

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: From Benjamin Lee, MD & Colleagues: Modeling the impact of school reopening on SARS-CoV-2 transmission using contact structure data from Shanghai (BMC Public Health: <https://rdcu.be/caSmF>). Full school reopening without mitigation measures is not a good idea. For younger kids, open schools have little impact on community transmission and can/should remain open (or be reopened) even if the community is in lockdown. Older students require more significant reductions in contact frequency, but it can still be done. We need to reinforce the message that schools can and should remain open even if other sectors need to be more restricted (as in Germany/other European countries). A press statement from AAPVT, VAAP, VMS titled "Vermont Physician Groups Call on Vermonters to Prioritize their Communities and Protect Schools for our Children" is coming soon.

VDH Update: Schools

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: We're seeing national reports of many schools suspending in-person education. The goal in Vermont continues to be keeping children and youth in school. There was a Process Change issued by AOE Secretary Dan French on 11/13/20 for school administrators to communicate directly w/teachers, staff and families. VDH will provide template language and details re: day 0 start, day 14 end of quarantine & day 7 testing options. There is some confusion regarding implementation. VDH-trained case investigators will continue to conduct thorough interview with all positives & meet with school administration to identify close contacts and make recommendations.

BCBS VT Connectivity Care Packages Pilot Program

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: This pilot program coordinated by VPQHC (50+ organizations participating) endeavors to support equitable access to telehealth services, esp. for those who are digitally & medically underserved. 20 iPads will be distributed to BCBSVT members by mid-December (must have access to service connect; iPad may be kept; may add other apps. To refer, email Julie Zack (Director, Integrated Health): zackj@bcbsvt.com.

VDH Update – Expanded Testing via CIC Sites Launching Now

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: Expanded testing via CIC Sites is now available 7 days per week. Two-thirds of Vermonters will be within a 30 minute drive to a center. They sites will be open 25-35 hours per week and walk-ins are accepted at all sites except Porter. Anterior nares testing is available with a lower age limit of 1 year old. Results will be available in VITL.

Practice Issues: Updates from the VDH Immunization Program, Merideth Plumpton, RN - Nurse Program Coordinator

Meredith Plumpton, RN, VDH: 99 practices sought the flu grant. You have until March 31, 2021 to submit for reimbursement. We have seen an increase of 47% of flu vaccine distributed compared to this time last year. 32 high-volume sites are currently not reporting to the IMR because of the cyber attack

Both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are close to filing for EUA and could be here in the next few months; dependent on FDA issuance of EUA and ACIP approval. Both are showing promising effectiveness in their studies. We are reviewing all data as it is released and want to ensure safety. The Pfizer vaccine has complicated storage and handling and needs to be kept at ultra-cold freezer temps. It is also a 2-dose vaccine. The Moderna vaccine can be kept in a regular vaccine freezer and refrigerated temperatures for longer periods of time. It is also a 2-dose vaccine. There is a COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee meeting this week. The committee will be reviewing scenarios on populations for Phase 1a, which is dependent upon the amount of vaccine Vermont receives. Provider training planning is underway and there is a public communication plan moving forward. The VDH COVID-19 website now has a vaccine page to which content will be added as it is received (linked here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/vaccine>). We will be enrolling providers for each phase of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Phase 1a will focus on hospitals and VDH District Offices. Phase 1b will be for pharmacies and FQHCs. Phase 2 will be for providers and phase 3 will be ongoing.

Questions/Discussion

Q: People on social media are stating no increase in hospitalizations/deaths. I'm not sure if VDH can get that information out to? They are using this as why the new restrictions aren't necessary.

A: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: Even with us pediatricians contacting our local superintendents and principals, it is so important to also continue to spread the message in the principal's association, etcetera. There's so much chatter in our community about closing schools.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: My bias is to make it broader and use the Governors words: we are doing this to a) keep kids in schools; b) adults in jobs; c) prevent infections; and d) minimize deaths.

A: Stephanie Winters, Vermont Medical Society: I will look at the press release and make sure we have that. We do talk about keeping the economy open and businesses as well!

Q: Can we plan on an update on vaccines at some point? I'm having questions about the mRNA vaccine and making "mutant cells" that I'd like to have a better standard way to answer it.

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: That is beyond what I am going to talk about today. We can get additional information out to this group. NY Times Vaccine tracker:

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/science/coronavirus-vaccine-tracker.html?name=styln-coronavirus-vaccines®ion=TOP_BANNER&block=storyline_menu_recirc&action=click&pgtype=Article&impression_id=e371eca0-29ac-11eb-8296-89a19310efcc&variant=undefined

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: I am not familiar with mRNA vaccines leading to mutant cells. We can do a review of it. Generally, once the mRNA is incorporated in cells, normal host protein synthesis machinery makes the protein coded for by the mRNA. In the world of COVID, the mRNA vaccines code for the spike protein. Once the cells make the protein, we can develop an immune response to it.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: There is always lots of apprehension/fear/misunderstanding whenever the topic is DNA or RNA.

C: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Drs. Lee, Raszka and I spoke to the Superintendents Association on Monday, the Principals Association, the NEA and the School Nurse Association, all to get back on track that we're not closing schools. You have a lot of power at the community level to go directly to your principals and say there's no reason to close schools. It's extra work, but I appreciate it.

*C: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: Here's another link:
<https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09799-8>*

Q: My understanding is that testing of vaccine on children has not occurred yet. Will not until they finish studies on adults?

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: Pfizer is testing in children (they were the first to release data). I am not sure about the Moderna vaccine.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: The Pfizer vaccine is in clinical trial in children down to 12.

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: Moderna told us Monday they have not started pediatric studies yet.

Q: Leah Costello, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics: I was interviewed again by WCAX this morning about schools. I also sent off an op-ed to many papers around the state. VT Digger said they would publish it in the next few days. I have not heard back from anyone else. If you want a copy of the op-ed to share with your local paper, please email me and I can send it to you. I did send it to Rutland, Newport, Times Argus (Barre-Montpelier), and many others, but I cannot remember.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: Great. Thank you! I am going to try to generate some press attention as well for our paper to provide another avenue for making the same point but I am not aware of other pediatric trials in the U.S., at least which have started yet.

Q: Do we have any idea what the turnaround time will be for test results at all these new sites?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Great question. Hoping for 2 day turn around.

Q: Are those sites up on the web yet?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I just confirmed that ON DEMAND testing sites have a sign up AND you can walk in.

*A: Ashley Miller, MD, South Royalton Health Center: Are these the ON DEMAND sites?
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/testing/where-get-tested>*

A: Michelle Perron, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics: Good to know! The sites say "FULL" on the VDH site, so that may deter some. Our office is telling patients to walk in.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Good plan. I just got confirmation. So that is our old website but it is updated and it now has all of the on demand sites as well as what would have been in the past a pop-up site. There's 11 sites in Vermont, but I'm noting what Dr. Perron's noting as it says full in parentheses. So I've just written to Shayla Livingston to say that's very strange, because if you're allowing walk-ins that are full, it's going to discourage walk-ins. Thanks for bringing that up. I'll try to get to the bottom of that.

Q: What is a typical amount of flu vaccines given each year in VT?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Last year, 270K Vermonters got a flu shot. The goal this year is 325K.

*Note: This is a paraphrased synopsis of the call and is not a word-for-word transcription.

Q: How will VT handle the ultra-cold issue for storage and will we, as pediatricians, be able to get the vaccine to give to our patient's parents?

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: We have a vaccine depot for Vermont and we are going to be storing Pfizer vaccine in that location and giving it out as hospital and district office run clinics for health care workers.

Q: Are school nurses included in Phase 1a?

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: Any medical professional is considered in that group.

Q: Which phase are nursing homes?

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: Great question, nursing homes are in phase 1b and there is a federal contract with CVS and Walgreens to go out to those nursing homes and offer vaccines to their residents and any health care workers that were not vaccinated in phase 1a so if a nurse that works in that facility or provider that works in that facility was not able to get vaccinated in phase one a when CVS or Walgreens goes out to that facility, they can get back need it as well.

Q: Real time for having a pediatric vaccine? Will adolescents be a target group? Are pediatric trials even happening?

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: Pfizer has been enrolling children 12 and over. I do not know how many have been enrolled to date. Moderna has not enrolled children.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & LCOM Dept. of Pediatrics: Just an educated guess here, but I would personally not anticipate having vaccines widely available for children before next summer, if not later. The issue is that for many candidates, the pediatric trials still have to be performed even with the head start that Pfizer has. The distribution challenge is very real there. Astra Zeneca has a planned pediatric arm, but I don't know if they have started enrolling children in England yet or elsewhere.

Q: Will the VDH be organizing large COVID vaccine clinics, similar to what we did for H1N1?

A: Merideth Plumpton, RN, VDH: We're definitely thinking about Pods, which are called points of distribution, but they're going to be more targeted towards health care workers that aren't part of a hospital group. And then in Phase 1B were enrolling or giving the chance for every pharmacy in Vermont to enroll, hoping that that will give better access to vaccines for people across the state, so we'll see how that plays out. And then I just wanted to throw in. There's no expectation of any practice to have the ability for ultra-cold freezer storage capacity. The ultra-cold vaccine does come in container that can be refreshed with dry ice. We're hoping by the time that offices are vaccinating that we're not having to worry about ultra-cold storage with this particular vaccine. They're doing trials right now on whether it can be stored at lower temperatures effectively. I'm really, really hoping that that's not an issue going for once we get to the point of wide distribution with offices that are vaccinating.

Q: Are the City of Burlington test sites at The Miller Center included in the VDH list?

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: I don't know the answer to that. I'll just remind folks, those were established I think in part in response to the data that was coming from the wastewater monitoring in Burlington and trying to understand where virus was being transmitted a little more thoroughly. In terms of the new test sites, the Burlington location that is part of the Garnet Group is at 108 Cherry St. so the health department office.