

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

November 25, 2020 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers*

Wendy Davis, MD, FAAP, Vermont Child Health Improvement Program, UVM

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 35 cases reported in the past seven days for a total of 110 cases as of 11/24/20. The College and University dashboard (linked here: <https://dfr.vermont.gov/about-us/covid-19/school-reopening>) shows the St. Michael's College outbreak (part of ice sports) is up to a total of 79 cases as of 11/24/20. UVM has a total of 107 cumulative cases as of 11/24/20.

New 11/23/20 from the CDC

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: If you haven't seen it, take a look at the ACIP's Ethical Principles for Allocating Initial Supplies of COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, 2020. While the U.S. supply of COVID-19 vaccines is limited, ACIP will make vaccine allocation recommendations. These recommendations are based upon scientific data, implementation feasibility and the four ethical principles: 1) maximizing benefits and minimizing harms; 2) promoting justice; 3) mitigating health inequities; and 4) promoting transparency. Ethical principles will aid ACIP in making these recommendations and state, tribal, local, and territorial public health authorities in developing vaccine implementation strategies based on recommendations.

In the News

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: New guidance on "Prioritizing Case Investigations and Contact Tracing for COVID-19 in High Burden Jurisdictions" was recently released by the CDC. It's really a recognition that folks are unable to keep up with contact tracing in many jurisdictions across the country. The guidance indicates contact tracing should focus on patients who tested positive in the past 6 days and those at greatest risk of infection others. Furthermore, the guidance does not recommend contact tracing for patients who have been infected for more than 14 days. I want to emphasize Vermont is absolutely redoubling their efforts to maintain the level of contact tracing they've been providing. Vermont has increased FTEs to improve capacity and they've actually been able to catch up with the help of the National Guard.

Pediatricians Continue School Advocacy

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: If you have not already read it, check out Dr. Rebecca Bell's blog post on "Making Sense of Pandemic Restrictions (Or Why Thanksgiving Dinner is Cancelled but Schools Are Not)" available at: <https://rebeccabell-md.medium.com/making-sense-of-pandemic-restrictions-a45888ca7bfb>. I would also recommend listening to the Vermont Edition segment from November 24th, which features Deputy Commissioner Tracy Dolan and Leah Costello, MD FAAP (volunteer CVSD Reopening Committee). Dr. Costello translated her letter to an Op-Ed and now to radio: <https://www.vpr.org/programs/vermont-edition#stream/0>. Dr. Costello has done a marvelous job articulating our concerns about keeping schools open. Also, Dr. Josh Kantrowitz from St. Johnsbury met with Cabot and Twinfield school communities and is collaborating with the Cabot School Principal Rebecca Tatistcheff.

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

Josh Kantrowitz, MD, NVRH St. Johnsbury Pediatrics: There's lots of anxiety in the community based on high rates in Washington County. I found lots of good data on the weekly summary put out by the VDH. There is lots of concern about older students passing the virus to each other.

School News

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: The VDH Updated Holiday Toolkit for Schools was published yesterday (November 24, 2020) to acknowledge the latest guidance. There was some misleading information put out about teacher testing, which is being corrected. The subject line read (to SB) indicated some Broad tests were "false positives," which is not true. These test results were invalid due to contamination. The statistics are being updated and the people will be retested. Also we will share template letters for school communication in tonight's email.

VDH Update – Testing

Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: Thank you so much to those of you who continue to share your testing experiences with us. Your feedback is relayed up the chain at the health department for continuous improvement. VDH Testing Information for Health Care Professionals is now available at: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/health-care-professionals/testing-information-health-care-professionals>. The VDH COVID-19 Testing Plan (July 27, 2020) is available at <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/COVID-19-Testing-Plan.pdf> and we anticipate a new HAN this week. VDH continues to conduct "Pop-Up" testing sites. Testing through the CIC partnership (tests sent to Broad Institute at MIT) are expanding rapidly. On-demand testing events are indicated with "OD" on the website and all other events are pop-ups.

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.

Practice Issues – Collaborating to Keep Schools Open

Alexandra Bannach MD FAAP – North Country Pediatrics, Newport; Christine Connor, MSN, MPH, RN – Public Health Nurse Supervisor, VDH Newport District Office; Thomas Harvey, RN BSN – PHN VDH Newport District Office

Christine Connor, MSN, MPH, RN: We implemented a process improvement plan in our area in collaboration with the schools. As you know, since this started, administrators from schools with associated confirmed positives have really taken over identifying close contacts of positives within the school. They are the ones who identify who amongst the student or teachers' contacts should be considered close contacts. With the surge in cases in our area. We have asked the schools to take this a little bit further. When they identify the close contacts, they will send out quarantine letters that will provide guidance in the quarantine of the close contacts at the schools. When we sent out these letters for our first case last week, the local pediatric offices had a surge in phone calls from parents with concerns and requests and it overwhelmed the primary care clinic. So, we had a huddle as a team to try to figure out what would be a simple way to increase communication about what has been asked of these families for quarantine without overwhelming the pediatric offices. We started sharing the quarantine letters that are sent out by each school with the North

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Country Hospital administration leads and the pediatric and primary care office managers, so the COVID-19 triage team staff and nurse educators could have the quarantine guidance as reference for when families call requesting either tests or follow-up appointments due to their child being identified as a close contact. Right now, I think that it's still pretty new because we just implemented this about a week ago. However, this process has really improved the communication between the learning community and the primary care community in regards to the guidance being provided to the families.

Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: We have now received these letters for 2 of our schools and are tremendously grateful for them. As everyone knows, we spend hours every day counting days on the calendar to identify quarantine periods and accurate testing dates for each patient (and all cases are just slightly different). Having specific dates in those letters eliminates the need to do that. It also allows us to ask families if they have received one of those (which equals being identified as a close contact). We are still hoping that it might decrease the number of calls. That remains to be seen, but it definitely makes every call much easier and shorter. I wish I could say this was my idea, but kudos to VDH.

Questions/Discussion

C: There are great exhibits on Vermont's native community at the Lake Champlain Maritime museum in Ferrisburgh - see their virtual exhibits.

Q: Are the students supposed to be tested soon after the last contact with someone outside of their immediate household and then again at day 7 or just day 7?

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: This is not only for this school situation but for some of this in general related to the quarantine. What I understand is that there is a health advisory that is in development. I think we were hoping it would be out this week, but I don't know the timetable. In general, Commissioner Levine reiterated this encouragement to be tested immediately, and again, he often applies this to people who have attended a gathering against advice. He says to get tested right away and then again at day seven, so I don't know that we can extrapolate from that, but we'll look for further clarification.

Q: We have noted in our practice that we need to be mindful about verbiage used. Initially asked about "any social gathering" and people failed to screen positive until identified already in exam room. Turned out to be a verbal barrier, are now asking if they have "gotten together with anyone who does not live in their home."

A: Judy Orton, MD, Green Mountain Pediatrics: Good verbiage.

A: Ashley Miller, MD, South Royalton Health Center: Are you not seeing them if they have been to a multi household gathering?

A: Alex Bannach: We're using sick entrance and sick rooms, but still seeing but then full PPE for us. This also prompts education, of course, about risk and testing and call for symptoms.

Q: How are schools going to handle this without having the kids be put in the middle? For example many families are still using grandparents or babysitters for child care, so that parents can work in essential jobs. So if the child answers "yes" to a "non-household" exposure contact, I feel the child should not be kept from school if the contact is for child care.

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: My understanding is that does not violate this this new recommendation, but I get that the language will have to be nuanced.

A: Stacy Strouse, MD, Northwestern Medical Center: Home dynamics are complicated for children, and some live in multi households, I worry how this will be sorted out between children and screeners.

A: Kate Cappelman Sinz, LICSW, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: I am concerned about the equity issues involved in asking children about multi-family gatherings... Not all families have the resources to have no

contact with others. Limiting the family "pod" makes sense to me. Also, I worry about asking children to take responsibility for adult decisions to interact with others...

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I think the language would not apply to essential activities, like child care--the focus really is just on gatherings for purely social reasons.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I agree, for activities outside the usual household activities.

A: Ashley Miller, MD, South Royalton Health Center: Dr. Lee, that would be great to clarify, because I have heard this from families as well.

A: Shannon Hogan, DO, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: Yes, we have to complete a form for our kids daily prior to in person school days

A: Sharonlee Trefry, VDH: On childcare calls and schools we try to focus on strengthening family trust and how the COVID Teams want to prepare for those nuances. We stress the equity view regularly.

Q: This is a nightmare for schools. If parents do not fill out the screenings, we screen before entry - and asking these questions of children is unacceptable. I have received numerous emails from parents who are confused about their particular circumstances.

A: Nate Waite, RN, VDH: <https://apps.health.vermont.gov/COVID/faq/diff.html> see the FAQ: "How can children stay safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19?" Gathering in groups or "pods" related to education or child care that are already formed can continue. Gathering in pods related to social activity, informal play groups, play dates, or sleepovers are not allowed at this time. New pods of any kind are discouraged. Find more guidance related to limits on multi-household social gatherings.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I know the language seems really hard. Unfortunately, I know many people who are very deliberately ignoring the guidelines. I suspect the alternative (fully remote for two weeks for everyone) is worse.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: The topic seems more emotional because of the complex emotions associated with seeing relatives and loved ones for holidays--but in essence it is no different than screening for travel--trying to ensure that people who have not followed stated mandates regarding risk activities are not entering the school setting. As bill states I think this was likely a compromise that was seen as necessary by the schools in order to remain open rather than pre-emptively closing for 1-2 weeks after the holiday

Q: Is this an exception to the guidance that says individuals living alone can interact with one household? If kids see a grandparent who lives alone, do they need to quarantine?

A: Nate Waite, RN, VDH: That's addressed in the Executive Order on page 3 under multiple household social gatherings suspended here: <https://governor.vermont.gov/content/addendum-8-amended-and-restated-executive-order-01-20-0>. Individuals who live alone may gather with no more than one other household.

Q: I am getting questions from my family and some friends about gatherings. If you have family members do childcare for you can you gather with those family members socially or not? Or same with another family who provides childcare? I think my understanding after yesterday is that childcare is ok but unnecessary social gatherings are not ok. My parents and I are still trying to figure this out ourselves! My parents take care of my kids and are today while I am at work.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I agree with your assessment.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I also agree.

A: Sharonlee Trefry, VDH: That is part of the planning that COVID-19 teams may want to prepare for -- being knowledgeable about the updates of allowed visits -- more equity and privacy issues for those in unsafe or dangerous domestic situations. This does take a lot of team work for the school and child care facility teams. Communication - communication – collaboration. It's time intensive -- but the pandemic provides no roadmap.

A: Nate Waite, RN, VDH: See the gatherings paragraph:

<https://apps.health.vermont.gov/COVID/faq/diff.html> see the FAQ: “How can children stay safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19?” Gathering in groups or “pods” related to education or child care that are already formed can continue. Gathering in pods related to social activity, informal play groups, play dates, or sleepovers are not allowed at this time. New pods of any kind are discouraged. Find more guidance related to limits on multi-household social gatherings.

A: Christine Connor, MSN, MPH, RN: I agree with Sharonlee, we encourage the schools leads to use these guidance as opportunities to educate their learning community in practices that can reduce their risk. Child care is considered as essential and schools should not exclude students for this reason.

Q: Do we have any clarity on whether people are allowed to gather tomorrow w family who currently provide childcare (i.e. grandparents)? We are getting tons of questions about this.

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: Our interpretation is that that is acceptable.

A: Elizabeth Wirth, School Nurse, U-32: Education is important and definitely falls into the role of schools - policing is another matter and can get very complicated. I don't want to be sending myriads of students home on Monday whose parents have not been honest on the screening and then the child reveals that they were socializing outside of their home. This often happens with traveling out of state, but his is much.