

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

February 10, 2021 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers*

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COVID-19 and Schools

Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: It was a busy weekend with school cases, 12 or 14 a day. The last few days have been a little bit better. It's important not to take everything as a trend. I am aware of that increase in the 0-9 age range, but I don't have a good explanation. It could be that pediatricians are doing a better job testing. That's my best estimate, but I could try to find out if our epidemiologist knows any more.

Practice Issues: Let's Grow Kids 2021 Legislative Agenda – Becca Bell, MD FAAP & Beverly Boget, LGK Director of Early Childhood Health Care Integration

Becca Bell, MD, AAP-VT, UVMCH PICU: This is an issue I care about a lot professionally and personally with two small children. I've been so grateful for the childcare professionals who work with them. During the pandemic, I've been so impressed with their leadership and how they've care for our community. Let's Grow Kids have well thought-out, well-supported agenda to do a few things in Vermont over the next 3 years: 1) reduce the cost of childcare to families, 2) increase access to high-quality child care by expanding high-quality child care centers, and 3) crucially supporting the workforce. Early childhood educators are the lowest paid professionals with a college degree. How do we compensate them fairly and help them grow professionally. IT systems are needed for the centers and for the families to search for available childcare in their area. Let's Grow Kids has a proposal for sustainable funding. A lot of employers are realizing how important reliable childcare is for their employees. This effort is popular, and something pediatricians can easily support. It's not controversial at all. You can all sign on to this policy agenda individually and highlight how much we care about this issue. I talk about how much I rely on childcare professionals in terms of taking care of kids. They are experts in child development, and the partnerships between families and pediatricians to bring concerns about child development forward. I am intentional in talking about early childcare educators, as well as schools, in keeping transmission rates low. There are things we can do to underscore how important these professionals are in taking care of kids and families.

Bev Boget, Let's Grow Kids: Let's Grow kids is a statewide non-profit organization with a mission of ensuring high-quality childcare to all Vermonters who need it by 2025. We work one-on-one with providers in the field to help develop their capacity. We inform policy and policymakers with research and data. We engage people throughout the state to bring forward their stories so that policymakers understand the need. On average, child care providers make \$13 per hour and do not have access to benefits. We want to change that in order to attract more people into the field. Now is the moment. We've got some real momentum, but what should we be doing? We have a lot of economic recovery from COVID to go through right now, and it might not be the year to ask legislators for a big investment. We put together a 3-year plan. We have 95 legislators who have signed on as co-sponsors of House bill 171 we just introduced. We asked for incremental investment in childcare and incremental funding that's in the Governor's budget. We also propose research and studies to evaluate outcomes of investment. We then recommend implementing the funding plan in 2023. Go on to <https://www.letsgrowkids.org/policyagenda> to sign on to support this policy. Our goal is to have at least one or two healthcare providers in every region of the state signed on to help us support this effort. Legislators really love to hear from you, and they value your input on this topic.

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

Questions/Discussion

Q: Kinney has plenty of appointments and vaccines so I'm wondering why we cannot start vaccinating our older patients if space/vaccine is available. Why/When?

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: Secretary Smith addressed this awareness of some individual's seemingly not eligible getting vaccines. The Administration continues to try to maintain their adherence to the current age banding strategy, though he did say they were going to open up availability to the next age band group, 70-75, in the near future. People giving vaccines are doing their best to try to stay compliant with the current system, but it is complex. There is a strategy for timing and opening up appointments for the next age band soon, and then individuals from the 75+ age band will also be able to continue to get vaccines if they didn't in the first round.

Q: Any news on the meeting with Secretary French about the guidance changing for schools?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes we have been granted permission to reconvene the Taskforce to update guidance. This will likely occur next week or so. Remind me if there was something specific you want to see changed in the current guidance? We have a long enough list of things that need to be revised. The Secretary of Education has said that Ilisa Stalberg and I can bring back together the Taskforce which we will do shortly. If there is something in the guidance that doesn't make sense or that you think is out of alignment with the evolution of our best practice please alert us.

A: Not anything specific, just wanting to start prepping for the fall. We'd like not to have to work all summer and pull so many people away to "build our pod structures", etc. It would be nice to get the guidance ahead so we can plan this spring.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I totally agree. What we are going to revise in the month of February is probably not going to be as accurate for August as you'll need it to be for group size, distancing and how to set up your classroom. I understand that it does make planning so much harder.

Q: Apologies if this has been covered ad nauseam lately, but why are VT teachers not being vaccinated yet as their work is so essential to pediatric and family mental and physical health?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Couldn't agree more. We're all on board here. I am impressed that the Governor is trying not to overpromise, but I know he has the teachers squarely in his consciousness. Vermont took the approach of small age bands and being methodical. I am the mother of educators in Massachusetts who were promised vaccines in February and haven't received them yet due because of expectation management and they were overpromised. The teachers are going to get vaccinated soon. I just don't know when.

A: Denise Aronzon, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics: The New York Times has a map of states who are prioritizing teachers and while usually we do so admirably on their metrics I am sad about this one.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: My reaction is don't be sad. If a state is prioritizing teachers, it doesn't mean they are going to have shots in arms of teachers anytime soon.

A: Kate Cappleman Sinz, Community Health Team Social Worker, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: Agreed re: vaccinating the teachers. While numbers are currently low for teachers, but they are vulnerable and their morals are being significantly impacted. I know that some states have begun actively vaccinating teachers (VA for example).

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I could not agree more. There are definitely states that are actively vaccinating teachers. I'm just not aware of how big those groups are in those states.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: Nor does vaccinating teachers guarantee that teachers will return to the classroom.

A: Becca Bell, MD, AAP-VT, UVMCH PICU: As an example of making sure we include ECEs: As AAP-VT is advocating for teachers to get vaccinated as soon as feasible we always include ECEs.

A: Ann Guillot, MD, UVM Medical Center: In NH, the earliest appointments for folks who have been promised the vaccine are in April.

Q: Is it the 60+ or 65+ band that will be done and then Governor et al will consider if compromised individuals will be considered?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: We're going into 65 by age and then moving into chronic conditions as far as today goes.

Q: Regarding the HAN: Is there any uptick in VT for gonococcal infections?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I do not know and just asked my VDH expert. Stay tuned!

A: Sarah Twichell, MD, UVMCH Pediatric Nephrology: I got a NY state HAN and it sounds as though there has been a fairly significant increase in gonococcal infections in NY State over the past year.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I just received word from our team that there is a slight increase, but not as big as New York.

Q: Has it been determined what FQHCs in VT will start to be receiving COVID vaccine shipments?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Monica, Vermont has not yet identified which FQHCs will get vaccine.

A: Stephanie Winters, Vermont Medical Society: In terms of FQHCs, VDH sent this out yesterday:

- *Public clinics are being run by Hospitals – all 14 community hospitals will continue to serve the 1A eligible population, and many are expanding clinics to the 75+.*
- *Health Department District Offices for use in Point of Distribution clinics (PODs).*
- *Three FQHCs – Northern Counties Health Care, Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) and Little Rivers Health Care.*
- *Kinney Drugs (20 stores)*
- *Home Health and Hospice*
- *Emergency Medical Services*
- *The Long-Term Care Partnership Program (external link)*

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: I think some of those sites were on the list prior to the announcement yesterday so I think, as the Governor said, there may be some additional information emerging, we just don't know yet. I will make a note of that and see if we receive any more information by Friday.

Q: Any thoughts about our Native Americans in Vermont? They have a slightly higher rate of COVID/death from COVID than African Americans and Latinos were also very close to that per the CDC data.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: We have a health equity team looking at BIPOC populations for both COVID disease and vaccine. Definitely have plans, I will confirm in your region.

C: Ann Guillot, MD, UVMCH Pediatric Nephrology: If this is a successful venture, it will be a remarkable and wonderful outcome of this awful pandemic. Thank you for your (all of you) advocacy on this!

C: Becca Bell, MD, AAP-VT, UVMCH PICU: I agree that this could be a positive outcome of the pandemic. It just makes no sense as a society to only invest in kids and families once children are 5 yrs. old.

C: Stephanie Winters, Vermont Medical Society: Let's Grow Kids Policy Agenda & Sign on:

<https://letsgrowkids.org/policyagenda>.