

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

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

Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I would just categorize this increase in school cases as a bummer. There is a letdown occurring. I do think there's COVID fatigue and a sense that things are getting better have led to a premature relaxing of the way folks are gathering and hanging out.

School-Age COVID-19 Cases and Youth Sports

Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Through the weekend it was clear that several schools were having to make the decision to switch to remote learning based on the sheer volume of people identified as close contact and having to quarantine. This continues to be adults and children. As noted before, a lot of cases are in the high school student age group.

Benjamin Lee, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I don't know the exact data but when you have this many sports teams all out on quarantine it seems like there's probably something going on related to sports. I think this has been one of our concerns all along, that if there are more cases associated with sports then that's going to have a ripple effect potentially throughout the rest of the school community. The winter sports season is ending on a bit of an ignoble note. The good news is that spring sports are almost all going to be outdoors. If any of the rise in cases was being driven by indoor winter sports then hopefully moving outdoors should start to mitigate some of that. Unfortunately it'll be maybe a month before we see any effect of that.

I do worry that the messaging has gotten a little bit muddled in Vermont. Because Vermont had done so well for so long and the messaging right now (with good reason) has been trying to focus on the positive. It does sort of miss the fact that Vermont is still continuing to chug along, arguably with the worst rates of transmission since the pandemic started. On the one hand you have a lot of COVID fatigue and a lot of good news to look forward to. But that's against the backdrop of us never really having experienced community transmission to this extent. I wonder if people are taking their foot off the break a little bit early. I think the best way to help get around that is moving things outside and hopefully the weather will cooperate ASAP.

Teacher Vaccination Rates

Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: The teacher vaccine rates are lower than anticipated. As you may recall, there was a survey before starting that program that showed 90-91% of Vermont's teachers reported they would take a vaccine. Actual rates are coming in considerably lower than that. I imagine many of you as child health professionals may have parents who are educators. I'm just curious if you've heard any feedback about that. I certainly hope it isn't some sort of implementation glitch in the clinics or availability. I think it may be that folks were excited and now waiting. But that leads to a little bit of concern on my end. If you have any feedback from talking to friends or family or patients, we at the health department would like to hear that.

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

Questions/Discussion

Q: Looking to find out if there will be a change to students distancing and following the new CDC's guidelines?

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: There will be discussion on this topic very soon.

A: Megan Spaulding, School Nurse, Union Elementary School: That's a game changer for many!

A: Leah Costello, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics, South: The CVSD COVID coordinator and I were speaking last week. A concern at CVU is three feet spacing in the hallways during transition times. Those would be short time periods and I am sure they could get creative about transition times. But just wanted to let you know that is a concern in high school settings.

Q: Could the increase in high school students be linked to winter sports? Or to spreading of variants?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH (verbal): Anecdotally, we are having cases and it is well publicized in the news. There are definitely cases on sports teams which increase the number of cases in a school. So I will say, yes, to that concern. Regarding the variants, that hasn't been the identified explanation. The way we send results to be analyzed genomically for variants is not really age banded so I don't think that's going to be the answer.

A: Sally Kerschner, RN, MSN, VDH: The concern is about carpooling and social gatherings before and after practices and games.

Q: How long are we expecting pediatric trials on the vaccine to take? I remember they started testing ages 12 and up a while ago. Is that data coming soon?

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I think the earliest that most are predicting is the summer to have results on the earliest 12-18 trials. That is, the trials for younger kids are really just getting started. There will certainly be a lot of discussion this week about the new CDC guidelines. I agree that the challenge is of interpretation of rates, what qualifies as high transmission, because although there's an allowance for the middle schools and high schools to go down to three feet. As I just mentioned, the rates of transmission still remain about as high as it ever has been and especially in the high schools with the sports. We're seeing lots and lots of cases and quarantines right now. I don't have any information on which way the Health Commissioner, the governor, or anybody meeting on this. So I expect the discussion will be interesting, but hopefully folks can get that hashed out sooner rather than later. The vaccine trials, again, that for pediatrics, is just going to be a while for the younger kids. I think, hopefully, by the fall everybody 16 and up may hopefully be able to get vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine at least so the juniors and seniors would be okay. It's the question of whether those middle schoolers and freshman and sophomores are going to be able to get vaccinated before the school year starts. Probably not but hopefully at some point during this calendar year. The big news is the AstraZeneca U.S. trial results were just released about an hour or two ago and I don't know if you had a slide on this or not, but I can tell you the initial interim results that I've been informed of is 79% efficacy against any COVID. 80% in those over 65 and 100% against severe disease and no thromboembolic events in the U.S. cohort, so this is all absolutely terrific stellar data. We were really hoping to see what these data would show, because the U.S. trials did proceed differently than all of the international trials in the sense that there was just one dose, one schedule, and very little of this sort of back and forth switching this, switching that, that sort of played in the earlier trials. So these are probably the cleanest data that we will get for the AstraZeneca vaccine. And it looks like it's terrific. I couldn't be happier. It's more good news as we head into spring.

C: Many school staff got vaccines through pharmacies. If you go online through the state, there are NO clinics near our school.

A: Becca (Rebecca) Bell, MD, UVM Medical Center: I think some are surprised with the reactogenicity and lots of teachers needing to be out at once. Need to stagger.

A: Sally Kerschner, RN, MSN, VDH: Some of the concerns are from blood clots reporting.

C: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: The only hesitancy I have seen is in pregnant or lactating teachers, otherwise mostly excitement.

A: Leah Flore, FNP, Shelburne Pediatrics: Substitute teachers are scheduled but not in the initial vaccine.

A: Stephanie Winters, Vermont Medical Society: Barre City closed to vaccinate teachers.

A: Leah Costello, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics, South: CVSD administered 1100 doses last Wednesday and did not waste a single dose! Amazing! They said the National Guard did an amazing job.

A: Megan Spaulding, School Nurse, Union Elementary School: The daycares I know in this area, Washington County, also had a hard time, Clinics were full so they had to go through pharmacies and it was challenging.

Q: Could vaccine administration for teachers be arranged for a Friday?

A: Breana Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I have it all captured. I think they thought through some of this but in the beginning I think they were wanting everyone to get it as soon as they wanted it, but I do think we're getting a little more organized about mass vaccination. Thank you! Great feedback!