

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

April 2, 2021 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers*

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Summer Enrichment for Vermont Children & Youth, Monica Hutt, VT Chief Prevention Officer, and Ilisa Stalberg, Director Maternal & Child Health, VDH

Monica Hutt: We are looking at K-12 ages and considering what we can do to mitigate the impacts of this entire year. This experience has been more profound for kids compared to adults in terms of gaps and barriers to adequate learning. The social-emotional impact has been significant. We had a youth council recently with the Governor, and these kids were so articulate in asking that we don't dismiss their loss and grief and what they'll need to recover.

Our Vermont Summer Enrichment planning will be partially dependent on the guidance for schools changing. This summer will be an important transition between this year of pandemic and what we all hope will be different when school starts again in the fall. We want to message that summer activities and camps are safe and important. We want those to be acceptable to kids and families. Planning has already happened for a lot of what's available in the summer for kids, and most of our programs have been reliant on what has existed to date. We are trying to build capacity in summer programs. We are asking schools to try to plan for 100% access and capacity, which is a little bit challenging right now given ongoing space restrictions for schools in Vermont. We want programs to be diverse in terms of content, interest, and income levels. We need to address engaging families who are coming at this with real trepidation and concerns. How will these programs keep kids safe? Kids themselves are coming at this with tremendous levels of anxiety. How do we make sure programs are accessible to kids with unique needs? How do we make programs affordable? Kids at the end of the age spectrum aren't going to be interested in summer camps, but they are going to be interested in internships or summer jobs.

We have an idea of creating an interactive map or portal utilizing our great partners at Vermont Afterschool. We need to get ideas about availability of slots, transportation, etc., but we need a tool families can use to identify opportunities for their kids. Governor Scott feels extremely strongly about these programs and allocating funding in this manner to support kids. We are looking at making programs accessible to kids with physical or intellectual disabilities, as well as kids struggling with anxiety and depression during this time.

We have two specific asks of the pediatric community. We know many kids are struggling with anxiety and general discomfort with moving back into a physical world. While they want to be connected, they also have fears around that. Part of our push in this process is to create some webinars that can help us help providers working with kids and families. It would be helpful if you could share any language we need to help kids adjust to this shift. How do we help families speak to kids about moving away from "Stay Home, Stay Safe" to re-connecting in the world? We want to open up a webinar far and wide for anyone working with kids and families. It will cover some language providers might use in talking about re-engaging kids during the summertime in the physical world and how to help families navigate that web portal/interactive map. Please join us as we push out that webinar and invitation for portal and engagement conversation. Also please help us think about points to focus on when talking to families about their kids engaging back into the physical world.

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

Questions/Discussion

Q: I heard there is a concern about the variants and increase risk of transmission from child to child. Do you have more information about that and your thoughts about the impact for children in VT?

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: When B1.117 first emerged, there was concern that it was more infectious in children. I think it is generally more infectious in general. I think that we will continue to see children with infection.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: B1.117 is likely more infectious in anyone who is infected with it, whether child or adult, but the relative pattern remains intact, so children still likely less infectious than adults. Mitigation works for all, but the margin for error is likely thinner with B.1.1.7.

Q: We are anecdotally seeing some increase in GI symptoms with COVID-19 positive kids. Is this true?

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: We've heard the same. I would say it's probably still too early to say whether this is a blip or a true signal.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: Dr. Holmes emailed us about this. We know that there is wide variation in presentation. I think that GI complaints have been reported since the onset of the pandemic.

Q: Trey Dobson yesterday brought up a concern about how VDH is reporting % of Vermonters who have been vaccinated and that number does not include all Vermonters, because < 16 year olds are not included. Do you know if VDH is looking at changing how that is reported on the VDH website? What is the % of the population of Vermont < 16 years of age? Do you know how other states report their % vaccination rate? Do they include children or not?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, Patsy Kelso (state epidemiologist) took that very seriously on the call yesterday and she is going to bring that to the data team and policy team. The moving denominator matters in these percentages. We should know soon if that is going to be changed.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I do not know 16 but 18% is under 18. Most have used "adult" rather than total population.

Re: Clarification re Dan French's comment on school staff vaccinations

C: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: 80 percent of teachers and staff are signed up for vaccine.

Q: Is the SBAC testing waiver student-specific?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: That's a state of Vermont waiver to try to get for the whole state for the standardized testing. It's not school-specific.

Q: Has there been any VT children hospitalized for COVID-19 so far?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, fewer than 6. That's the standard way to record small numbers.

A: Becca (Rebecca) Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: None at UVMMC that I know of.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: No. A couple who have been admitted for other reasons and found to be positive on testing, but none admitted for COVID-19.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: We have had patients at UVMMC.

A: Becca (Rebecca) Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: There have been a few patients at UVMMC that have had positive tests on screening but are admitted for other things.

Q: Do we have any information about vaccination rates of health care providers in VT? NCH is at around 80%.

A: William Raszka, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: At UVMMC it is very, very high. I think over 92%.

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A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: It varies quite a bit across centers. UVMCH is 92.5%, but at other centers it can be far, far lower than that.

Q: How about free access to the State Parks for children and their parents this summer?

A: Monica Hutt, State of Vermont: I love this idea and will bring it back to the team.

A: Becky Collman, MD, Collman Pediatrics: Or at least the free one-time park passes we have received in the office prior summers.

A: Ashley Miller, MD, South Royalton Health Center: Love it! We used to give out the state park Rx's. Free would be even better.

Q: Can some of these funds go to libraries in towns for summer programs?

A: Monica Hutt, State of Vermont: Yes, we are also working with libraries so that they have the same access to supports and grants and funding so that they can expand also.

Q: How about summer jobs for High School students at the State Parks to lead hikes around the Park with younger kids?

A: Monica Hutt, State of Vermont: We can use some of older kids to staff some of these summer programs for younger children. Expanding these opportunities will be dependent on workforce and health guidance that makes everyone comfortable.

C: Monica Hutt, VDH: Thanks for the great ideas, feel free to email directly with thoughts or suggestions: monica.hutt@vermont.gov.