

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

April 7, 2021 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers*

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COVID-19 in VT Children and Youth

Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I am enjoying that we went from 115 to 109 cases. That's the right direction for the first time for several weeks for schools. Middlebury College has done very well, although there is a 4-day weekend coming up. We are all aware the college cases are associated with variants, which are more transmissible.

This is a remarkably clear and accurate way for an educator to be talking about COVID-19 and our young people. CCSU Superintendent Mark Tucker is saying that the in-school transmission is the same as it's been all along, what we're experiencing is cases due to community spread and in-home transmission. Wendy's right, here we go into the next few weeks. I thought Vermont had all the same April breaks, but there's a group going out this week and then the following week. I like this honest conversation. It's not blaming. People have to balance their mental health needs with the pandemic environment. It's very indicative of where we need to go and where we want to be.

Questions/Discussion

Q: Do we know if the hospitalized and ICU patients in VT are still elders? Or are they younger?

C: Sally Kerschner, RN, MSN, VDH: Keep in touch with VtPHA website - we are having a great webinar on Public Health Communications on May 5 at noon with Rebecca Brookes and Shari Levine. Co-sponsor with New England Public Health Training Center. FYI: link to VtPHA webinar on PH Communications <https://www.nephtc.org/enrol/index.php?id=212>.

C: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: I would like to applaud the Health Department on addressing racial and social inequalities by creating an initiative that will bring COVID-19 vaccine to migrant farm workers at their worksites (farms)!

C: The 4 day break starts this upcoming weekend for Middlebury. They are messaging students and families a lot with appropriate cautions.

C: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Thank you. I thought it was last weekend. Fingers crossed.

C: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: This is one of the potential unintended consequences of positive messaging regarding the trajectory of the pandemic in general, but also of increased in-school learning. This may lull people into a feeling that it's okay to let their guard down.

C: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: I agree, our SU is doing a great job messaging to parents and students to keep up precautions and stay safe.

Q: Can the parent who is fully vaccinated go to work if their child tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Becca Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: The parent would have to ask their workplace.

C: Unfortunately, our local high school also had to suspend in-person schooling for the rest of this week due to # of families keeping kids out of school due to increased cases in community.

C: Lori Racha, MD, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: Charlotte Central School is remote tomorrow due to staffing issues. Sounds like some is due to staff side effects from vaccines.

C: Becca Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: Are parents in your area keeping kids home because they have to (i.e. close contacts and have to quarantine) or is it voluntary because they are nervous about kids getting exposed to COVID-19? Just wondering where people are in your area.

C: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: I am reading between the lines of the school communication here but think it is a combination of both.

C: Becca Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: Thanks. I'm always just curious to hear how things are going especially in your area. You're my key to the NEK area.

Q: Is there any concern about kids returning to school after being tested so soon to returning from traveling out of state per the new guidance?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Let's wait until we get to the new guidance when Dr. Davis covers the media briefing.

Q: Are the vaccine dashboards accurate with information from pharmacies in the federal program?

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: Eventually, these data will be reconciled, but, unfortunately, right now, the systems just aren't talking to each other.

A: Melanie Lawrence, MD: Kinney is doing many teachers' vaccines.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I thought Kinney was doing a lot of teacher vaccines as well, so that would need reconciling.

A: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: Upper CT Valley has announced, they are starting vaccine clinics on 4/19! Got email from Canaan school nurse this a.m.

Q: Are those whose COVID test gets checked and is a variant notified?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I don't know the answer. I will find out.

Q: So for step 1 on the roadmap to reopening, the unvaccinated person, do they stay home from school until the negative test result if they traveled?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: No, there's none of that. No unvaccinated person will be asked to stay home while awaiting their tests. It's not just schools. Unvaccinated adults who travel and can come back to work, go to restaurants, etc.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Unvaccinated children are able to travel and return without quarantining, can go to school for 3 days, and then are supposed to test. It has left schools feeling exposed. We can only assume it will come down as an honor system. Everyone is saying, "Please don't travel," but if you do travel, you don't have to quarantine. It's a paradox, and there's no real science behind the 3-day testing requirement.

Q: For returning to VT after travel do unvaccinated people need to quarantine while they are awaiting COVID PCR test results?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Nope.

Q: I am trying to interpret these: If at a gathering, any eating needs to be done with family members only, as masks are off to eat?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I assume you're talking about unvaccinated people? Vaccinated people can gather and can be unmasked. Everyone can be unmasked when they eat.

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: I think that probably falls into the category of the sort of standard other guidance that is still in existence being in play at those times. So as you know, it might be that unvaccinated people can eat out and drink, but would take their masks off to do so, as is currently being required, but I'm noting that and we'll see if we can get a more specific answer because it may be there somewhere and I just didn't see it.

Q: For example, a student could travel internationally over the April break and come back to school with a negative test the day they return. That seems a lot different than a family traveling to Massachusetts to visit vaccinated grandparents.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I could not agree more. We're working with the AOE for a FAQs for questions like this and doing a town hall out to nurses to send out the confusing messages, "Please don't travel, but if you do travel, come on in." It's not the Vermont way anymore to make distinctions based on locations for travel.

Q: Can they go back to school prior to the test results?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, no waiting.

Q: They are planning to go back in-person after break. Why not wait until June 17 to change this to protect our schools for our kids/teachers/staff?

A: Susan Sykas DNP, Appleseed Pediatrics: I agree.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: It's all been discussed. I hear you, and we will have to see what happens. It was the turning of the spigot.

Q: I have been requiring test results prior to returning to school to help determine if tests were done on the correct day. I was told by a person at VDH that students will need a negative test before returning to school.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, we've recognized the space in time between yesterday at 11:00 o'clock and today when you're hearing this officially from me, there were some really well intended colleagues who were trying to help, and we're thinking students needed to quarantine while waiting for test results. But I'm giving you with great authority that that is not the case and we are going to double back now on our community partners, our Community School liaisons, all of our school nurses tomorrow and make sure everybody is on the same page.

A: Shannon Hogan, DO, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: I agree, but again, kids/schools are not being considered.

A: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: It seems that now that the group most at risk of death is well protected, the general attitude has been "Mission Accomplished". We've heard those words spoken with hubristic overconfidence before...

A: Ann Wittpenn, MD: Great point.

A: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: I am concerned about the backlash we will experience when the first child returning from travel and having attended school gets a positive COVID result after 5 days. That is a lot of exposed students and teachers and I worry that this will mean that hybrid schools will NOT be willing to return to fully in person schooling.

C: Shannon Hogan, DO, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: That is exactly what I am worrying about.

C: Becca Bell, MD, UVMCH PICU: Here's an important message for us to get out there for parents: If your kid is a close contact then they will have to quarantine and that is hugely disruptive. So, masks, distancing, etc., with gathering or traveling is key if you don't want them to be exposed.

C: Ann Wittpenn, MD: Yes, the bottom of the steps says masks required and physical distancing unless with household.

C: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I am completely befuddled as to why the decision was suddenly made now that travel no longer poses a risk to anyone.

C: Colleen Moran, MD, Appleseed Pediatrics: I am completely baffled. This does not make any scientific sense based on our understanding of the past year.

C: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: I hear you. This is based at a growing number of people who are vaccinated and, at some point, we need to move toward the endemic nature of the virus. Putting people into quarantine after travel is hugely disruptive and not a necessary mitigation strategy anymore as seen by the Governor and his advisors at this point.

C: Shannon Hogan, DO, UVMCH Pediatric Primary Care: I agree with Dr. Lee. This late in the game, most parents, including myself were not planning to have big plans over April break. I think the rise that we have seen recently was related to them loosening the restrictions of hanging out with other families a few weeks ago.

C: Liz Hamilton, RN, Christ the King School: I agree. I'm dumbfounded by this. It just feels like such a big fast change after so much hard work to comply with previous guidance.

C: Marshall "Buzz" Land, MD, LCOM: I agree with Dr. Lee's "yikes," why allow kids to go back to school and then require a test?

Q: How do we know that our children won't have sequelae following infection? I'm less than excited about my immune-compromised kid having potential exposure at school.

Q: Is this finalized or in discussion?

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: This is final, but nothing's final in COVID-19. We can package up these comments and send them up the flagpole. I just want encourage us to stay in a positive space together about a balance because it wasn't completely misinformed decision but I certainly appreciate your feedback as well.

Q: NCH lab director said we do not get specifically notified which patient tested positive for variant, just that one sample in our batch tested positive.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, that's correct. We aren't notifying them of variants.

C: Monica Fiorenza, MD, Timber Lane Pediatrics (South): Based on NYTimes data VT is the 11th highest COVID rate in the country per 100,000 over the last 7 days. Depending on where people are traveling and what they are doing, Vermonters may be at lower risk of exposure to COVID-19 through travel, then they are staying in VT and gathering with others.

A: Breena Holmes, MD, VCHIP, VDH: Yes, that's a good way of framing it.

Q: So, schools should eliminate travel questions altogether?

A: Wendy Davis, MD, VCHIP: What I didn't say, or I think I had it on an earlier slide that I skipped over that. So we do expect this education guidance to come out this afternoon. It's very streamlined. It is happening I guess I'll say somewhat in parallel with this whole Vermont Forward plan, so we will revisit this on Friday. Although there was a great immunization data brief that came out from the Health Department with all the latest on their preliminary data on immunizations, which differences between 2019 and 2020, we will have that link in the email tonight. But we will touch on that briefly. On Friday, there will be a media

briefing Friday and that there will be some additional reaction to this, including that Secretary French of the Agency of Education would give his update on Friday, so we'll pay attention to that.

A: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: My community is seeing higher case rates than ever in the past year, I will have a hard time supporting this message.

C: Benjamin Lee, MD, UVMCH & Larner COM Dept. of Pediatrics: I really am not a fan of the new travel policy (if it wasn't clear). The vaccination argument misses the point that the group responsible for all the transmission right now has yet to be vaccinated.

C: Jeanne Kellner, MD, Shelburne Pediatrics: I'm not seeing the logic in all of this.

C: Exactly. Even my 12 year old just looked at the slides and said why are we not vaccinating the 20 year olds who are getting COVID-19 and spreading it? It is so upsetting to me as a parent and pediatrician that again kids are being thrown under the bus with this new guidance.

C: Alex Bannach, MD, North Country Pediatrics: Again, I think getting all kids back to in-person schooling is more important than 3 day quarantine for those who choose to travel.