

## Clinician Update

Jan. 13, 2022

### Critical Blood Shortage Continues – “Unprecedented Times”

The American Red Cross is experiencing a dangerously low blood supply. As Virtua works with the Red Cross to host several upcoming blood drives, Virtua Laboratory medical directors are struggling to make due. In a memo sent this week to Virtua clinicians, Dr. David Obando, chairman of laboratory services, noted that since his last update to physicians, “Inventory levels have not improved. In fact, they have declined.” For this reason, Dr. Obando says that Virtua will be monitoring all transfusion requests. “These are unprecedented times,” he said. “But working together, we can help preserve our precious commodity. Lastly, I ask that you please consider donating.”

We invite you to join your colleagues in helping to maintain a sufficient blood supply, either at a Virtua location listed below or another drive in the region. And to spread the word.

Click to [view eligibility](#) to donate blood. Upcoming dates include:

#### **Friday, Jan. 21**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Voorhees, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

#### **Tuesday, Feb. 15**

303 Lippincott Drive, Marlton, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

#### **Friday, Feb. 18**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Berlin, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

#### **Monday, Feb. 21**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Washington Township, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

#### **Tuesday, Feb. 22**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Voorhees, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

#### **Monday, Feb. 28**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Moorestown, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

#### **Tuesday, March 1**

Virtua Mount Holly Hospital, 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

#### **Friday, March 4**

Virtua William G. Rohrer Fitness Center, 3 to 7 p.m.

#### **Monday, March 7**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Moorestown, 2 to 7 p.m.

#### **Tuesday, March 8**

303 Lippincott Drive, Marlton, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

#### **Friday, March 11**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Berlin, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

#### **Friday, March 18**

Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Voorhees, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Signing up for blood drives is quick and easy. Appointments are preferred. Scan the QR code or click to [sign up](#) and use sponsor code Virtua. Feel free [to share this video](#) with all first-time donors.



### **Seeing the Good, Sharing the Good**

Positive thoughts fuel our energy and keep us grounded in the present moment. As we kick off 2022, let's continue to see the good in our day, in each other, in the world around us.

Remember that our thoughts become our words. Our words become our actions. Our actions become habits, and habits, well, they tend to stick around. What a wonderful habit we could collectively make out of seeing and sharing more good. Check out our latest [Wow We video](#) to be inspired about the good here at Virtua. What good are you seeing? #HelloGood.

### **New Jersey Sees First Downtick in COVID-19 Hospitalizations since Dec. 16**

New Jersey had 156 fewer COVID-19 hospitalizations overnight Wednesday than the prior day, down to 5,933 overall—the first time hospitalizations have dipped during the current wave of the pandemic since Dec. 16. The number of patients needing intensive care also dropped slightly, to 907, and there were three fewer needing ventilators.

While the downtick, combined with five straight days of declining COVID case numbers, may seem promising, current state modeling projected that hospitalizations will peak during the current wave at about 8,000 by the end of the third week of January, and could stay at high levels for several weeks before starting to decline in early February.

Meanwhile, area hospitals, including Virtua Health, are near capacity. Dr. Reg Blaber, EVP and chief clinical officer, told the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) last week that most of Virtua's COVID patients are unvaccinated. Those who are vaccinated, and particularly those who received a booster, are experiencing less severe illness compared to the unvaccinated.

### **Changes in Face Coverings in Virtua Acute Care Hospitals**

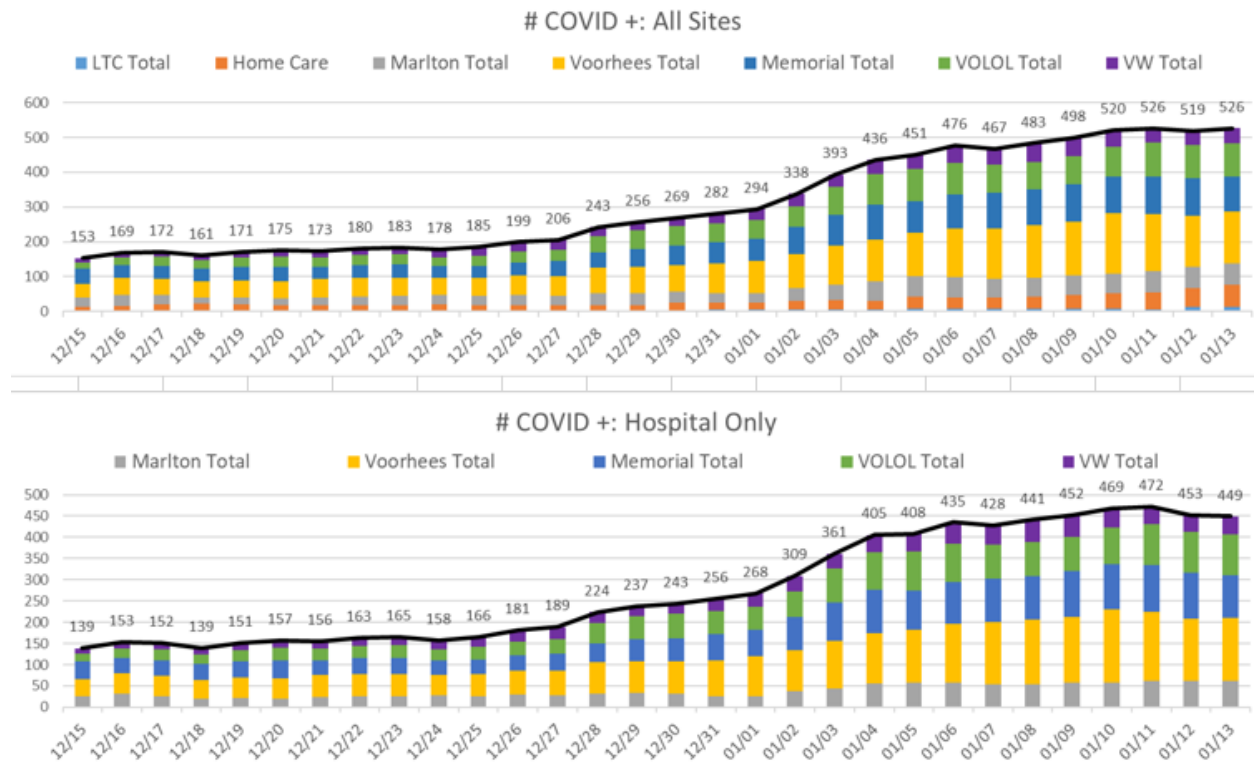
Beginning Friday, Jan. 14, in Virtua's acute care hospitals:

- Surgical ear loop masks will be replaced by KN95 masks, which provide better "source control" as a face covering.
- **A KN95 mask is not a substitute/replacement for an N95 mask.** It is not to be used for airborne/AFB and quarantine isolation or during aerosolizing treatments.
- **Fit testing is NOT required as the KN95 mask is replacing ONLY the surgical ear loop mask.**
- Click the link for the [step-by-step flyer](#) explaining how to perform a seal check.

- When a KN95 mask is not available or you cannot get a good fit, it is recommended to wear two surgical ear loop masks.

**Reminder:** Colleagues will continue to wear N95 masks in the following areas: critical care, designated COVID units, OB triage, dialysis, OR, ED units, and specific procedural areas. Eye protection remains in place for all patient encounters.

## COVID-19 Census



## Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- The rate of transmission in New Jersey is 1.29, a positive trend from last Thursday when it was 1.69
- The total number of cases (as of 3 p.m. Jan. 12) are as follows:
  - Burlington County: 70,853 cases
  - Camden County: 89,180 cases
  - Gloucester County: 47,410 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester counties: 3,163.
- The state’s Vaccination Overview dashboard reported 15,727,472 doses of vaccine have been administered.

## Top COVID-19 Questions Answered by Dr. Martin Topiel

We asked Dr. Martin Topiel, Virtua chief infection control officer, to answer a few of our colleagues’ top questions.

**Dr. Topiel, everyone is hoping that we may have reached the peak of the omicron surge. What do you think?** We continually monitor various metrics, and there are signs and signals that the infection level has peaked in our community. Statewide New Jersey numbers and data from Philadelphia suggest a decrease in transmission rates and new infections. Even closer to home, we are seeing fewer infected colleagues on a daily basis. All this gives reason for hope.

**How long before we can expect to see fewer COVID patients in our hospitals?** Hospital admissions are a “lagging indicator,” meaning that they reflect trends that are already underway. A “leading indicator,” by contrast, helps to suggest what is likely to happen in the days and weeks ahead.

Lab-confirmed COVID cases (PCR) in New Jersey were at their peak on Dec. 27, 2021, and have steadily come down—particularly in the last two to three days. This is an imperfect statistic because it does not account for at-home tests and people self-diagnosing without reporting—but it is encouraging.

If this trend continues, we can expect to see fewer COVID patients in the emergency department and fewer being admitted to the hospital.

Making predictions is a dangerous game, but my sincere hope is that our inpatient COVID census will begin to decline this upcoming weekend and thereafter. It will clearly take time, however, before we return to our averages from November and early December.

**What are your hopes for the second half of January?** More than anything, I want our community to keep their guard up and protect themselves and their families. The best way to do that remains vaccines and boosters. Virtua colleagues in particular should get boosted right away—our mega-site is open and ready to greet them. [Making an appointment takes only a few minutes.](#)

From what we have seen in our hospitals, unvaccinated people are the most vulnerable for severe COVID illness. People who got the booster, by contrast, are the most protected. It is rare for someone who is boosted to enter the ICU and require that advanced degree of care.

Let’s also remember the importance of masking indoors in any public setting. If everyone in the community wore masks properly and consistently, it would go a long way toward public health and would ultimately support a functioning, safe hospital environment.

**You mentioned booster vaccines. Can you remind us who is eligible?** Anyone 12 and older is eligible for a booster five months after their second mRNA vaccine, meaning Pfizer or Moderna. (For clarity, those 12 to 17 years old are only receiving Pfizer.) Anyone who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine can get a booster two months after the initial vaccine, and they can switch to an mRNA vaccine if they prefer.

Remember, third doses are not considered boosters for people who are immunocompromised. Rather, that third dose is part of a full vaccine series because they are extra vulnerable. Some immunocompromised people are, in fact, now [eligible for a fourth vaccine dose.](#)

**What’s the latest with monoclonal antibody treatments?** I also hope we can regain our momentum in this realm. Omicron presented a challenge because the previous therapies were not effective, and the product that worked well—sotrovimab—was not readily available. If cases go down and supplies go up, we can support more people in this meaningful way.

**Winter weather is most certainly here, meaning colleagues can no longer eat meals outdoors. What advice can you give around enjoying breaks in a safe manner?** Given how easily omicron can pass from one person to another, and the possibility that someone could be asymptomatic-but-contagious, I think it best that people dine alone. We have had numerous colleagues infected by sharing meals in small breakrooms with limited ventilation. It's no fun, but I suggest colleagues take their meals in the cafeteria and try to social distance from one another.

Even if you can't eat with your teammates and friends, make it a point to check in with them. Our relationships are essential to our emotional well-being and give us a boost of energy. A quick, impromptu conversation can mean a great deal, especially given the strain our front-line workers are experiencing.

### **New Public Health Emergency Declared in NJ to Battle 'Omicron Tsunami'**

Gov. Phil Murphy on Tuesday announced he has declared a new public-health emergency in New Jersey to keep measures in place to curb the spread of [the coronavirus](#)—including [requiring masks in schools](#)—ahead of them expiring on Jan. 11.

The governor has said the “omicron tsunami” has been “washing across the state” as tens of thousands of new cases are reported daily and hospitalizations are reaching heights not seen since the initial wave.

Reinstating a health emergency allows Gov. Murphy to keep current measures in place—including mandates for teachers and health care workers to be vaccinated or face regular testing, and a requirement that hospitals regularly report information to the state.

It also ensures other lesser-known measures can continue, like allowing pharmacists to administer coronavirus vaccines, eliminating the need to require a prescription to receive a COVID-19 test in certain scenarios, and managing staffing and resource distribution.

But Gov. Murphy insisted this decision does not bring any new restrictions, mandates, passports, lockdowns, or gathering limits. “It does not mean going backward from any of the progress we've made together over the past 22 months,” he said in [a video message](#). “In fact, in your day-to-day life, this step won't have any new impact at all.”

“While we hope to return to a state of normalcy as soon as possible, the step I am taking today is a commonsense measure that will protect the safety and well-being of all New Jersey residents while allowing state government to respond to the continuing threat that COVID-19 poses to our daily lives,” he added in a statement.

[Nearly 2 million New Jerseyans](#) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, more than 100,000 have been hospitalized as a result, and nearly 30,000 have died in the past 22 months. In recent weeks, case numbers have spiked to record levels and hospitalizations have quadrupled, according to state data.

### **Pfizer Manufacturing Vaccine that Targets Omicron**

This week, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla reported a vaccine that targets the omicron variant will be ready in March, and the company's already started manufacturing the doses.

Bourla said the vaccine will also target the other variants that are circulating. He said it is still not clear whether or not an omicron vaccine is needed or how it would be used, but Pfizer will have some doses ready since some countries want it ready as soon as possible. “The hope is that we will achieve something that will have way, way better protection particularly against infections, because the protection against the hospitalizations and the severe disease — it is reasonable right now, with the current vaccines as long as you are having the third dose,” Bourla said.

As of last week, omicron made up more than 95% of all new COVID-19 cases in the United States.

White House Chief Medical Adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci in December predicted that omicron would become the dominant virus strain in the U.S., but he has not said that a new omicron-specific shot is necessary to maintain immunity. Dr. Fauci instead [urged Americans to get booster shots](#), which studies have shown provide greater protection against omicron.

A recent [study](#) from the U.K. Health Security Agency found that booster shots are up to 75% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 infection caused by omicron.

To schedule your booster shot at the Burlington County COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site, visit [virtua.org/vaccine](https://virtua.org/vaccine).

**Note:** Virtua colleagues who receive the COVID-19 vaccine, including a booster dose, outside of Virtua should submit verification via email to [covidvaccinedocumentation@virtua.org](mailto:covidvaccinedocumentation@virtua.org). Please include your employee ID number and photo of the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card.

### **Vaccine Clinics Nationwide Stress that Booster Shots Will Save Lives**

Earlier this week, the [Wall Street Journal](#) wrote about the resurgence of large-scale vaccine clinics – featuring locations in Massachusetts, Oregon, and other states – in an effort to get more people vaccinated and boosted in the latest COVID-19 surge driven by omicron.

The Burlington County COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site in Mount Laurel was featured in the article, which stated that there are hopes to reach some of the 27% of adults who aren’t fully vaccinated against COVID, according to CDC data.

The mega-site is averaging 1,000-plus people a day, which is up from about 200 people a day in early December. Between 50 and 100 adults each day are getting the COVID vaccine for the first time.

“In speaking with people, it’s clear the omicron variant has folks concerned,” said Phyllis Worrell, Virtua Health emergency preparedness coordinator and vaccine clinic manager of the mega-site.

The U.S. has recently averaged about 1.1 million new doses a day, federal data show, which includes people receiving booster shots.

According to new research from the Commonwealth Fund, tripling the pace of booster vaccination from 770,000 doses per day to 2.3 million could reduce the expected number of COVID hospitalizations by more than 35% and deaths by nearly 30% through April.

While hospital admissions are expected to peak at approximately 30,000 per day near the end of January, tripling booster vaccination would reduce the peak to 21,000 and significantly reduce the duration of the surge, the study found.

Not only could tripling booster vaccination save about 63,000 lives over the next four months and prevent nearly 600,000 hospitalizations, but it would also provide much-needed relief to short-staffed hospitals and their workers.

### **National Research Shows Physician Knowledge Lacking in Understanding ADA**

We all share Virtua's commitment to diversity and inclusion as we strive to equitably serve our community. That includes the disabled. In an article published this month in *Health Affairs*, researchers set out to ascertain physicians' knowledge about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accommodation of patients with disabilities.

Their findings suggest that nearly three-quarters of office-based physicians don't understand how to accommodate their patients' disabilities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 1 in 4 adults in the United States has some kind of disability—and people with disabilities face significant barriers to health care, with a full third of adults with disabilities lacking a routine health care provider.

Through the ADA, we have legal obligations to accommodate patients with disabilities, and the research indicates that to achieve equitable care and social justice for patients with disability, considerable improvements may be needed to educate physicians and make health care delivery systems more accessible and accommodating. An [abstract of the study can be found here](#).

### **Virtua in the News**

- **Rowan, Virtua to Create New Academic Health System**—Virtua and Rowan University announced plans to form the Virtua Health College of Medicine & Health Sciences of Rowan University. It will include an osteopathic medical school, expanded nursing and allied health professions school, school of translational biomedical engineering and sciences, and new research institutes. Read the *Philadelphia Business Journal* story [here](#). For interviews with Virtua President and CEO Dennis W. Pullin and Rowan President Ali Houshmand, read [here](#) and [here](#).
- **Baby Boom! Virtua Sets Record for Births In 2021**—Virtua saw a 7% increase in the number of babies born last year, with a record 9,109 births at Virtua facilities. Read [here](#), and learn more about how we're helping our new Afghan neighbors to give birth [here](#).
- **Hospitals Across Region Welcome First Babies of 2022**—Among the area's New Year's babies is little Raegan Jean, born at 3:51 a.m. at Virtua Voorhees Hospital. Enjoy the cuteness on [CBS 3](#) and [NJ.com](#).

### **Seeing the Good, Sharing the Good**

Virtua Health is excited to present the second episode of our ~~Wow-WE~~ video series, in which we showcase all the good we see at Virtua and in the community. Click to [view the latest Wow-WE video](#).

**Thank you, Virtua COVID-19 Testing Team!**

Congratulations to the Virtua team for setting up the COVID-19 Testing Center at the Virtua Barry D. Brown Health Education Center two days ahead of the initial goal.

The team has provided more than 1,000 COVID-19 tests to colleagues, urgent care telehealth referrals, community members, and more.

Also impressive, the labs are processing more than 1,800 COVID-19 tests each day (from this site, the five hospitals, and the two satellite emergency departments) and pushing them out on MyChart with speed and precision—providing test-takers with vital information. Amazing work!

### **CASTLE Program Hosts COVID-19 Vaccination Day**

The CASTLE Program at the Virtua Health & Wellness Center— Camden recently hosted a COVID-19 vaccine clinic for its patients ages 5 to 11. Through the collaboration of many Virtua teams, 22 first doses of the vaccine were administered to CASTLE patients. Although it was the coldest day in January to date, families came out with warm smiles and excitement to get their children vaccinated.

Special thanks go to the CASTLE Program, the Pediatric Mobile Unit, Tatum Brown Residency Program, Virtua Camden security, and volunteer services, including pet therapy. The star of the day was Rex, a three-year old golden Labrador who greeted patients and stayed with them while they waited 15 minutes after receiving the vaccine.

The teams are looking forward to CASTLE's next COVID-19 vaccination day at the Virtua Health & Wellness Center – Berlin on Tuesday, Jan. 18.

### **Upcoming Online Courses for Providers**

- ***Global Impact on Hepatitis C Elimination (Thursday, Jan. 20, 6 to 7 p.m.)***—This session will review strategies to improve hepatitis C care and the management and benefits of a hepatitis C cure. Virtua designates this continuing medical education activity for a maximum of 1.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits. Click to [view the flyer](#).
- ***Beyond the Basics—Best Practices for Starting and Continuing Advanced Care Planning Conversations (Tuesday, March 15, 6 to 8 p.m.)***—By completion of this educational activity, learners will be able to successfully implement effective strategies for continued advanced care planning conversations. Virtua designated this live medical education activity for a maximum of 2.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits. Click to [view the flyer](#).