

## **Clinician Update**

### **August 19, 2021**

#### **Virtua Health Hosts COVID-19 Vaccine Town Hall**

On Tuesday, Virtua Health leaders held a virtual town hall, answering colleagues' questions about the COVID-19 vaccine and Virtua's mandatory vaccination policy. Nearly 400 colleagues attended the session, where leaders addressed the vaccines' safety and efficacy, natural immunity and COVID antibodies, booster shots, the emergence of variants, and the reasons behind Virtua's vaccination policy.

The hour-long session touched upon a range of topics. Notable remarks include:

**Dr. Jen Khelil:** *"We know that if you are vaccinated, you are much less likely to contract COVID-19. However, if you are one of those breakthrough cases, vaccinated individuals handle COVID-19 much better than those who are not vaccinated. It is very, very rare that a fully vaccinated person requires hospitalization or any type of intensive care support. The chances of an unvaccinated individual developing severe illness, possibly landing in hospital, or even dying are significantly higher. We strongly encourage everyone to be vaccinated. As long as this virus is circulating, it has the ability to evolve, mutate, become more resistant to vaccines, and perhaps become even more deadly. By getting vaccinated, you are helping everyone avoid that type of circumstance."*

**Dr. Martin Topiel:** *"Natural immunity is not as powerful as the vaccines' immunity. All the talk about the third dose only further exemplifies how natural immunity and vaccines' immunity need further boosting... We know COVID-19 kills. We know it causes the "long haul" syndrome. We are seeing an increase of infection in children. We need to protect our children by keeping ourselves safe... There have been more than 350 million doses given; I am not sure any vaccine ever had that amount of studying before it was initiated. This has been an amazing miracle in invention."*

**Dr. Reg Blaber:** *"The COVID vaccine may be new, but the mRNA technology behind it has been evolving for decades. People may say that it was rushed to market. It came to market fast because of the incredible work from brilliant people from all over the world coming together to fight the pandemic. This vaccine has been found to be efficacious and safe... All of us know people who have gotten the vaccine and they have had transient side effects, such as headache, fever, and fatigue, but that are gone between 24 to 48 hours. Let's talk about the people who got COVID. More than 600,000 Americans died, and there are innumerable people who've had long-lasting side effects."*

**Dr. John Matsinger:** *"A booster will be coming at some point... we will wait for the recommendations from CDC, the White House, and others. We will react accordingly. If boosters are recommended, we will look at the timing of administering the boosters along with influenza shots. We will have conversations with Virtua infection control colleagues about the timing. Essentially, we will work through it and make sure our colleagues get what they need."*

**Dennis W. Pullin:** *"I know that a lot of folks didn't necessarily agree with our decision to mandate the vaccine, but I felt compelled. I felt we had a responsibility to protect our community, who trust us with their care. They have the right to feel safe and that we would do everything possible to create a safe environment. I felt it would be irresponsible for us as an organization to not do what has proven to be the single greatest line of defense against the virus. A lot of people disagree with that. But in a short period of time, just about every health care organization across the country will fall in line and have the*

*same mandate. I don't think that we are, by any means, outside of the norm... I feel that it is the right thing to do, based on the science, based on demonstrated effectiveness, and based on demonstrated safety."*

Click to view the [Town Hall](#) in its entirety.

### **Upcoming Colleague Vaccine Clinics**

Virtua continues to offer colleagues the opportunity to get vaccinated through pop-up clinics. Below you will find upcoming events. To schedule an appointment, email [covidmegasite@virtua.org](mailto:covidmegasite@virtua.org) or phone **856-325-4222**.

**Aug. 20**, Virtua Mount Holly (Memorial) Hospital, 8 a.m. to noon

**Aug. 24**, Barry D. Brown Health Education Center. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### **Q&A with Dr. Martin Topiel**

Dr. Martin Topiel, chief of infection prevention at Virtua, asks all colleagues to **speak up for safety** and adhere to best practices for maintaining healthy work environments. We asked him to share his thoughts regarding the most recent coronavirus concerns.

#### **As a follow up to your last Q&A, what is the latest regarding the Delta variant?**

The more we learn about the Delta variant, the more we see that it is extraordinarily transmissible. Both unvaccinated and vaccinated people can acquire it and spread it to others. Some individuals, likely vaccinated people, may have little to no symptoms, which makes contact tracing extremely difficult. Given these considerations, we must keep our guard up.

#### **What do you want staff to know about Virtua's visitor policy?**

We have to adapt and adjust based on what's happening in our community. Currently, the average patient may have one designated visitor for the duration of his or her stay, and that visitor must wear a mask at all times – regardless of vaccination status. I encourage staff to read the [complete visitor guidelines](#) and communicate the key points with colleagues, patients, and guests.

#### **Will outside visitation be suspended like it was at earlier points in the pandemic?**

That is certainly possible. If our visitors do not comply with the guidelines, it creates an unsafe environment and opens the door to preventable infections. If infections spread on certain units, it can cause staffing shortages.

We know how much it means for patients to see and spend time with someone they love. But we can only allow this if everyone is on the page.

**No matter who you are or what role you play – we must all stick to our safety rules. We cannot think of them as restrictive or burdensome, they are essential for saving lives. Our actions have incredible consequences.**

#### **What recommendations do you have regarding meals at Virtua facilities?**

I encourage visitors to eat before coming to the hospital. That way, they aren't hungry when onsite and are more likely to keep their masks on. The Delta variant is highly transmissible, so having a patient and visitor share a meal creates a high-risk environment.

The same thinking applies to our staff. Some break rooms and lounges are small; I would much rather colleagues take their meals outside to patios and picnic tables whenever possible.

### **Do you have any advice regarding PPE?**

I only want to emphasize how important it is. Remember, goggles and masks are mandated for all patient-facing encounters. The goggles serve to protect colleagues from COVID-19 potentially entering via mucous membranes. We should be just as diligent with PPE today as we were at any other point in the pandemic.

### **Many people are experiencing summer colds and allergies – what should we make of mild, manageable ailments in the time of the Delta variant?**

We are a safety-minded organization, and so we need to play it safe. You should not come to work, even if you would typically shrug it off as “the sniffles.” There is ample evidence that, for some people, the Delta variant can present similarly to allergies or a sinus infection. Therefore, call the colleague hotline and receive guidance on what your next steps should be.

### **COVID-19: Who to Contact When**

With so much happening, it's hard to keep track of who to contact for various COVID-related concerns. Let this "cheat sheet" be your guide.

#### **Contact the Access Center at 856-325-4222 or [COVIDMegaSite@virtua.org](mailto:COVIDMegaSite@virtua.org)**

- If you want to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment

#### **Contact the colleague COVID-19 hotline at 609-444-2828**

- If you test positive for COVID-19
- If anyone in your household is positive for COVID-19
- If you have been in close contact (within 6 feet for longer than 10 minutes) with someone who has tested positive (community exposure)
- If you develop any of the COVID-19 symptoms below, and the symptoms are not explained by another known diagnosis:
  - Fever of greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit
  - Loss of taste or smell
  - Cough
  - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
  - Sinus-type or allergy-type symptoms (common Delta presentation in the vaccinated)
  - Aches or pains
  - Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Anyone in your household develops COVID-19 symptoms as described above (whether or not they plan to be tested)
- Anyone in your household has been exposed (within 6 feet for longer than 10 minutes) to a known positive case
- If you have been quarantined and you develop symptoms
- If you have been quarantined and you are ready to return to work (ask for the Return to Work team)
- If you return from international travel

**Remember:** Colleagues who believe they may have been exposed in the community should call the colleague hotline. Colleagues who believe they may have been exposed at work should speak with their direct leader. If a colleague calls the hotline regarding a potential work exposure, the colleague will be directed back to their leader, who will partner with infection prevention to investigate potential work exposures.

**The colleague COVID-19 hotline is open Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday voicemails will be returned during morning hours.**

**COVID-19 Vaccine Roll-Out to the Community**

The Burlington County Health Department and Virtua have joined forces to bring COVID-19 vaccines to residents of traditionally underserved communities. **Through Thursday, Sept. 2**, Burlington County officials will accompany Virtua’s fleet of mobile units to administer vaccines to anyone interested and eligible.

“Our focus is truly local, and each newly vaccinated person is a small victory in our ongoing effort to stop COVID-19,” said Burlington County Health Department Director **Dr. Herb Conaway**. “With the Burlington County Mega-Site, we asked the community to come to us. Now, with this campaign, we are teaming with Virtua again to go out directly into the community.”

Both the Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) versions of the COVID-19 vaccine will be available when customers visit Virtua’s fleet of community-outreach vehicles.

Visitors can also shop at the Mobile Grocery Store and Farmers Market before or after being vaccinated.

Any vaccine recipient under 18 years old will require consent from a parent or guardian.

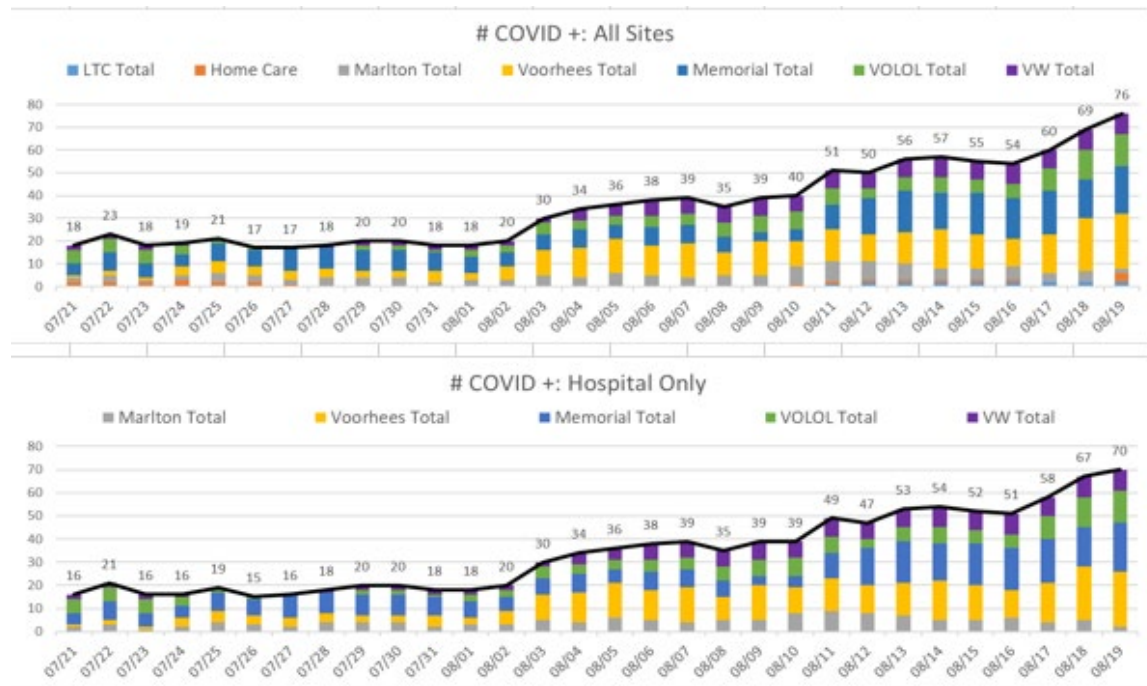
**Locations, dates, and times include:**

<a href="#">Virtua’s Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store</a>	Sunbury Village	181 Norcross Lane, Pemberton, NJ 08068	Aug. 31	2 to 3:30 p.m.
<a href="#">Virtua’s Eat Well Mobile Farmers Market</a>	Burlington County Human Services Building	795 Woodlane Road, Westampton, NJ 08060	Aug. 26 Sept. 2	9:30 to 10:30 a.m.
<a href="#">Virtua’s Pediatric Mobile Services</a>	Life Four Corners Childcare Center	201 Clarkson Street, Burlington City, NJ 08016	Aug. 19	9 a.m. to 12 noon

Vaccine recipients do not need an appointment. Although recipients are encouraged to bring identification and proof of health insurance, if possible, neither are required and no one will be turned away.

“Our goal is to provide as many people as possible with the potentially life-saving protection of vaccines. We promise to make it a simple, straightforward experience,” said **Maria Emerson**, director of Virtua Pediatric Mobile Services.

## COVID-19 Census



### Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- As indicated above, we have once again begun to report the Virtua census figures, which show an unfortunately steady increase in caseload within our facilities.
- The rate of transmission in New Jersey is now 1.27.
- The total number of cases as of 3 p.m. are as follows:
  - Burlington County: 40,103 cases
  - Camden County: 51,236 cases
  - Gloucester County: 27,786 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester counties: 2,721.
- The state's Vaccination Overview dashboard reports 10,842,254 doses of vaccine have been administered.



### **Virtua Heart Team Performs Milestone 1000th TAVR**

On Monday, the Structural Heart team at Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital performed its 1000th transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), an innovative, minimally invasive procedure to help the heart more effectively pump blood to the rest of the body. Virtua performed its first TAVR in 2013, and has become a leading center for heart valve surgery.

“This achievement is a true team effort, reflective of a collaborative, comprehensive approach to care,” said Ibrahim Moussa, DO, an interventional cardiologist and medical director of the Structural Heart Program at Virtua. “It is gratifying to have improved the lives of so many people in South Jersey—and to know that we will continue to support our community in this vital way.”

Dr. Moussa and cardiothoracic surgeon Charles Stivala, DO, performed the procedure. They were joined by three colleagues who helped perform Virtua’s first TAVR: Steve Naegele, RN, Kathy Albino, RN, and Briona Maden, RT.

TAVR treats aortic stenosis, a buildup of calcium on the leaflets of the aortic valve in the heart. Over time, the leaflets become stiff, reducing their ability to open and close fully. As a result, the heart has to work harder to pump blood to the rest of the body. The heart may weaken, causing chest pain, fatigue, and shortness of breath.

TAVR uses a catheter threaded through an artery to insert a new valve inside the heart. Once opened, the new valve pushes aside the old one and begins to work immediately, restoring proper blood flow and instantly improving symptoms. Patients usually spend only one night in the hospital.

“As a cardiologist and health care executive, I’ve had the privilege to work closely with the extraordinary Structural Heart team as the TAVR program has grown and matured,” said Reg Blaber, MD, EVP and chief clinical officer. “The fact that we have reached this important milestone as rapidly as we did is a testament to the faith the community places in us to care for their health.”

## **Stress Management Resources**

### **Carebridge Connects**

Virtua's partner Carebridge continues to assist colleagues with staying resilient with ongoing challenges—particularly as we navigate emotionally through the COVID-19 pandemic and cope with significant concerns unique to health care workers. We invite you to view the following virtual support groups:

### **Stress Check-Ins**

- [Wednesday, Aug. 25](#)
- [Tuesday, Aug. 31](#)
- [Wednesday, Sept. 8](#)
- [Thursday, Sept. 16](#)
- [Monday, Sept. 20](#)
- [Wednesday, Sept. 29](#)

### **Grief and Loss Check-Ins**

- [Friday, Aug. 20](#)
- [Monday, Aug. 23](#)
- [Wednesday, Sept. 1](#)
- [Friday, Sept. 10](#)
- [Tuesday, Sept. 14](#)
- [Wednesday, Sept. 22](#)
- [Tuesday, Sept. 28](#)

For current pandemic information, including webinars, recordings, and articles, visit [myliferesource.com](http://myliferesource.com), and click on the COVID-19 Resource Center. Carebridge confidential services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call **800-437-0911** or email [clientservice@carebridge.com](mailto:clientservice@carebridge.com).

## **The Brave of Heart Fund for Health Care Workers**

Together, New York Life and Cigna created the Brave of Heart Fund, which is dedicated to providing health care workers and their families with peace of mind. The fund is designed to provide financial support in the form of charitable relief grants to support the families of health care workers who've lost their lives to COVID-19.

Additionally, Cigna behavioral health will provide emotional support and services.

If you know anyone who could benefit from this program, please share this information with them via this link: [braveofheartfund.com](http://braveofheartfund.com). The last day for families to apply is **Friday, Dec. 31**.