

**Clinician Update**  
**Dec. 9, 2021**

**Reminder on Remote Patient Monitoring for COVID Patients**

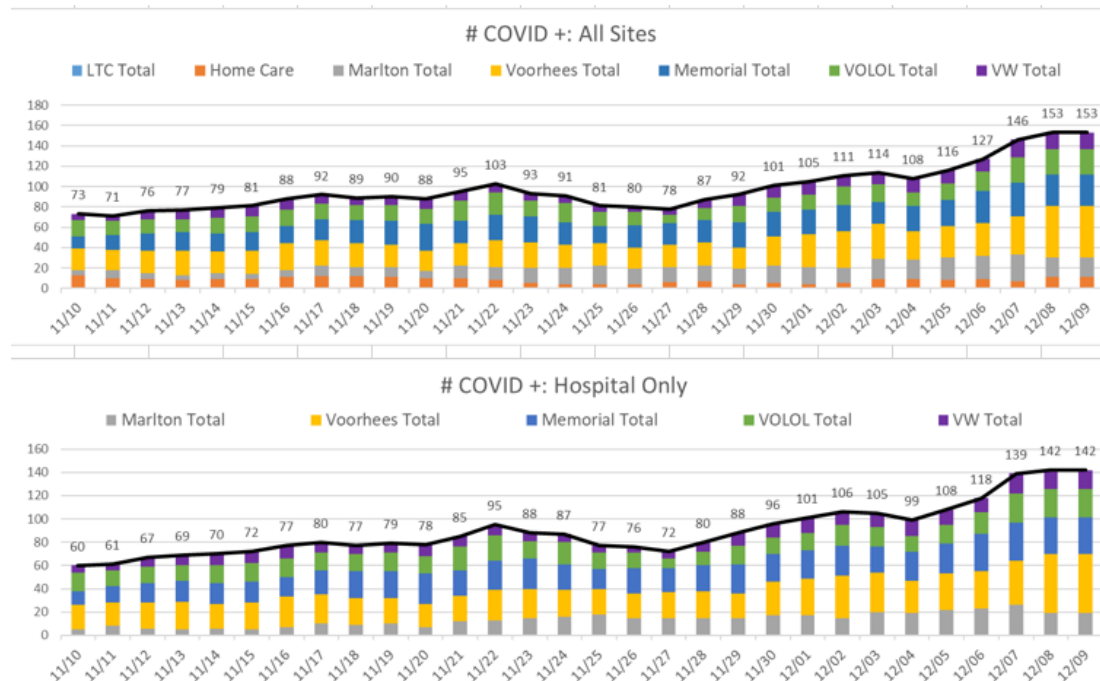
With winter fast approaching and inpatient and ED volumes on the rise, our efforts are heightened to prevent hospital readmission, reduce length of stay, and improve the patient experience. Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) is an effective strategy for accomplishing these goals, especially for COVID-19 patients.

Patients with COVID-19 diagnoses who are deemed appropriate can be discharged from the Emergency Department to the Emergency Department RPM program, or EDRPM. Patients are provided with a fingertip pulse oximeter device and will virtually attend one-to-three scheduled telehealth visits with a physician to ensure illness improvement. Referrals can be placed by ordering a follow-up with the EDRPM program at the time of discharge. So far, more than 1,000 patients have been served by this program, and initial analyses suggest that participants benefitted from a significant reduction in return ER visits and hospital admissions.

Similarly, adult inpatients with COVID-19 can be discharged home to the inpatient COVID RPM program with a pulse oximeter device. Once home, they are supported by our population health nurses and physician telehealth visits over the course of two weeks to help guide them back to wellness. Referrals to the program can be placed in Epic. More than 500 patients have benefited from this service.

For more information, contact Angela Skrzynski, DO, clinical lead of Urgent Care Telehealth, Care After COVID, and COVID-19 Remote Patient Monitoring Inpatient and ED, at [askrzynski2@virtua.org](mailto:askrzynski2@virtua.org).

**COVID-19 Census**



## Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- The rate of transmission in New Jersey is 1.39, continuing a trend upward.
- The total number of cases as of 3 p.m. are as follows:
  - Burlington County: 50,725 cases
  - Camden County: 63,600 cases
  - Gloucester County: 35,612 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester counties: 2,985.
- The state's Vaccination Overview dashboard reports 14,182,786 doses of vaccine have been administered.

## Latest on the Omicron Variant

Yesterday, Pfizer and BioNTech reported that initial laboratory tests suggest a booster shot of their coronavirus vaccine offers significant protection against the fast-spreading omicron variant. On Tuesday, the *New York Times* provided answers to key questions concerning the variant. Click here to read the [full article](#). Following are excerpts\* from that story:

- 1. Does omicron spread faster than earlier variants?** The evidence for faster spread of omicron seems strong.

A bigger unknown is why it's spreading rapidly, and there are two plausible answers. The first is that omicron is spreading more rapidly among unvaccinated people than earlier variants did. The second is that vaccinated people and those who were previously infected may contract omicron more often than they contracted earlier versions of the virus.

- 2. Is omicron more severe than earlier variants?** Probably not.

Some scientists think it's simply too early to know whether the average person who contracts omicron becomes sicker than the average person who contracted earlier versions of the COVID virus.

But other scientists believe that the early signs are more positive. It's reported that hospitalization and death rates in South Africa have not soared, even as cases have. Intriguingly, patients are even reporting less loss of taste and smell.

- 3. So are vaccinated people protected or not?** The answer depends on the meaning of "protected." Are vaccinated people protected from any COVID infection—or from severe illness?

The evidence so far suggests that omicron may be more likely to infect vaccinated people than earlier versions of the virus. Yet there is still no sign that omicron will cause a significant share of vaccinated people to get *severe* versions of COVID.

Dr. David Dowdy, a Johns Hopkins epidemiologist, put it this way: "Our immune systems are designed to protect us from getting sick, not from getting any infection whatsoever."

However, immunity among the vaccinated and previously infected does seem to wane over time. All of this argues for getting vaccinated, even if you already had COVID, and getting boosted, if you're eligible.

4. **Do COVID tests—including both PCR tests and rapid at-home tests—still work?** Yes, based on the signs so far.

#### **Bottom Line**

We are still learning about this variant; it is too early to jump to conclusions. Vaccinated people should feel greater urgency around getting booster shots. Older people and others who are vulnerable, like people receiving cancer treatment, should continue to be careful and ask people around them to test frequently.

Unvaccinated people remain at substantial risk of serious illness. About 1,000 Americans have been dying each day of COVID in recent weeks, the vast majority of them unvaccinated.

*\*Passages have been lightly edited for length and clarity.*

#### **Burlington County COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site FAQs**

On Tuesday, the Burlington County COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site officially opened after a successful soft launch last week. This new mega-site—at a new location in Mount Laurel—provides a convenient way for people to get the vital protection vaccines provide.

Below are some of the most common questions about the mega-site. Please spread the word to your patients, friends, and family.

**Where is the new Burlington County COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site?** The new mega-site is located off Nixon Road in Mount Laurel as part of the East Gate Square shopping center. The mega-site is located inside a former A.C. Moore store, adjacent to Home Depot and Party City. Onsite signage will guide you to the correct location, and ample parking is available.

**How do I schedule an appointment?** Schedule an appointment by visiting [virtua.org/vaccine](https://virtua.org/vaccine).

**Are walk-up vaccinations available?** Limited walk-up vaccinations are available. However, having a scheduled appointment helps ensure the best possible experience. Scheduling an appointment online is easy, and is strongly encouraged by the mega-site operational team.

**When is the mega-site open?** The mega-site is open Tuesdays through Saturdays. Hours of operation vary by the day.

**What version of the vaccine will I get?** The mega-site primarily carries the Pfizer vaccine. Anyone looking for an initial vaccine series will get Pfizer (including children, as Pfizer is the only vaccine approved for those ages 5 to 17). Those looking for a booster dose will likely receive Pfizer as well. If someone feels strongly that they want Moderna for their booster, they must schedule an appointment for a Tuesday. Tuesday is the only day of the week Moderna is available.

**Am I able to get Pfizer as my booster if I received Moderna or Johnson & Johnson initially?** Yes. Federal and state agencies have authorized “mixing and matching” for vaccine boosters. Therefore, you can “switch” to Pfizer for your booster (provided it has been six months since your initial Moderna vaccine series or two months since your one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine).

**What should I bring to my vaccine appointment?** Anyone receiving a second or third vaccine dose should bring their CDC-issued vaccination record card. A photo ID and proof of insurance are also helpful, however the vaccine is free to recipients and health insurance is not required. [Identification, while preferred, is NOT required](#). Also, consider wearing a short-sleeved shirt under your jacket or coat, making it easier to present your arm to the vaccinator.

**Is there a sensory room in the new mega-site?** Yes! The sensory room at the original mega-site was well received by the community. Therefore, the mega-site team built a nearly identical sensory room in the new space too.

**Where can I learn more?** Visit [virtua.org/vaccine](https://virtua.org/vaccine) for a complete list of common questions and answers.

### **Cigna Contract Status**

We have reached an important point in the contract renewal between Virtua Health and Cigna that may result in questions from your patients and the broader community. Currently, we have not reached an agreement on new contract terms for 2022. While we continue to work in good faith on a fair solution, Virtua Medical Group and Virtua hospitals would become out-of-network beginning Jan. 1, 2022 without a new contract in place.

Cigna has initiated communications with its members of this potential termination, outlining the initial implications this development would have on costs and care options.

We want to make sure our medical staff is aware of ongoing efforts to renew our contract with Cigna and to be a resource for questions you may have. If patients are looking for more information, it will depend on the specifics of their insurance and we should encourage them to talk to their plan about the importance of coverage at Virtua Health. In the interim, we will make every effort to work out a solution with representatives of Cigna as you provide continuity of care and the high-quality service your patients experience from you.

### **Hello Good Happenings**

The media often cover acts of *goodness* by Virtua and our amazing colleagues. Here are some recent examples!

- **New COVID-19 Vaccine Mega-Site Opens in Mount Laurel** — Virtua joined with our government partners to launch a new version of the Burlington County Mega-Site this week. The facility offers first, second, and booster shots to adults and children ages 5 and up. The site will help protect the lives of many thousands of our neighbors. Watch on [6 ABC](#), check out today's story in the [Burlington County Times](#), or read our [news release](#).
- **Two Virtua Hospitals Recognized for High-Quality Maternity Care** — *U.S. News & World Report* included both Virtua Voorhees Hospital and Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital among just 10 Philly-area hospitals it spotlighted for outstanding maternity services. Read the *PhillyVoice* story [here](#).
- **Virtua among 13 NJ Hospitals Designated a Top Teaching Hospital** — The Leapfrog Group named Virtua Voorhees Hospital to this prestigious list. "It takes leadership, teamwork and absolute dedication to patients to achieve this award," noted Leah Binder, Leapfrog's CEO and president. Read [here](#).

- **My Fabulous Weekend Getaway—to a New Jersey Hospital** — NJ101.5 radio host Dennis Malloy writes, “The staff was amazing at Virtua Marlton,” where he recently spent the night after an emergency department visit. Read about his positive experience [here](#).

### **Give for Good: Achieving our Goal, Together!**

Virtua’s colleague campaign, Give for Good, celebrates our shared Culture of WE, bringing all Virtua colleagues the opportunity to support the programs and services that mean the most to them. We are thrilled to announce that because of more than 1,100 Virtua colleagues who have already made a gift in 2021, we are fewer than 200 gifts away from our goal of 1,300 unique colleague donors this year.

We have about three weeks left in the year and feel confident that together, we can achieve our goal. If you are considering your participation, you can make an impact; 100% of your gift does directly support the program or service you designate, and no minimum giving level is required—all gifts are important and appreciated.

**To make your gift today:** click the “Give for Good” button on the VINE or visit [GiveToVirtua.org/Colleagues](http://GiveToVirtua.org/Colleagues).

Questions are welcome. Please call the Office of Philanthropy at 856-355-0830 or email [gratitude@virtua.org](mailto:gratitude@virtua.org).

### **Help Your Community by Giving Blood**

One good turn deserves another. We invite you to join your Virtua colleagues in helping the American Red Cross maintain a sufficient blood supply.

The Red Cross will host several blood drives at various Virtua locations in the weeks ahead, including:

#### **Monday, Dec. 13**

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

#### **Monday, Dec. 20**

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

#### **Wednesday, Dec. 22**

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

#### **Thursday, Dec. 23**

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

#### **Tuesday, Dec. 28**

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

#### **Thursday, Dec. 30**

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

#### **Tuesday, Jan. 4**

Virtua Mount Holly Hospital, 10:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

#### **Thursday, Jan. 6**

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

#### **Friday, Jan. 7**

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

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

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

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

Signing up for blood drives is quick and easy. Appointments are preferred.

Click to [sign up](#) and use sponsor code “Virtua.” We encourage all first-time donors to view this [video](#).