

Clinician Update

December 8, 2022

SPECIAL UPDATE: Aetna Contract Update

We have reached an important point in the contract renewal between Virtua Health and Aetna that may result in questions from your patients and the broader community. Currently, we have not reached an agreement on new contract terms for 2023.

While we continue to work in good faith on a fair solution, Aetna has initiated communications with its members in Medicare Advantage and self-funded plans with a letter outlining the impact on care options, consistent with regulatory requirements.

Virtua hospitals would become out-of-network beginning **Jan. 1, 2023**, without a new contract in place. While this does not directly impact provider contracts, physicians would likely be required to obtain privileges at in-network hospitals with Aetna.

We want to make sure our medical staff is aware of ongoing efforts to renew our contract and to be a resource for questions you may have. If patients need more information, we should encourage them to talk to their plan or employer representative(s) about the importance of continued coverage at Virtua Health.

With the help of Dr. Jen Khelil, we have also prepared a video message that we will begin to share more widely depending upon how negotiations go. Her message should help you better frame the situation and the options patients can take.

[Click here to watch.](#)

We will make every effort to work out a solution with Aetna as you provide continuity of care and the high-quality service your patients experience from you.

Flu, RSV, and COVID-19: A Q&A with Dr. Dennis Guest

This week, the U.S. set a one-week record for positive flu tests. As national news outlets report on [this flu season's ferocious start](#) with its record-shattering levels of transmission, experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued a warning of a "triple-demic" as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19 cases rise.

To help our colleagues better understand the challenges facing us all today, and to help you in your daily interaction with patients, Dr. Dennis Guest, VP of clinical operations, answers commonly asked questions about this "perfect storm" of seasonal viruses.

The CDC declared Dec. 5 to 9 as National Influenza Vaccination Week. What does that mean to you?

I see it as an opportunity to remind people that anyone six months and older is eligible for a flu shot, and that now is a good time to get the vaccine (if you have not already). This awareness campaign

includes [social media templates](#), and encourages use of the hashtag #FightFlu. As people in the health care industry, we should spread the word however we can.

How would you describe the current volume at Virtua Health’s emergency departments?

We are seeing incredibly high volume among adults and children. This can result in extended wait times for people, unfortunately. I recommend folks use Virtua’s [online wait-time tool](#) so they have a sense of which locations are busiest and what the approximate wait might be.

What do you attribute this surge to?

In many ways, it represents a “perfect storm” of flu, RSV, and COVID-19 cases. People are not wearing masks and socially distancing as they have the past two winters, and so these seasonal viruses have greater opportunity to spread. I’ve heard of instances in which a person recovers from the flu and then contracts COVID a few days later—it’s really tough.

Can you give a general overview of RSV?

RSV is a seasonal virus, particularly common among all ages of children. While most people experience cold-like symptoms, it is the leading cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia among babies in the United States, according to the CDC.

The symptoms of RSV often include shortness of breath, a runny nose, a decrease in appetite, and a cough—which may progress to wheezing. For infants, the symptoms may manifest as irritability, decreased activity and appetite, and pauses while breathing. RSV may bring on a fever, but not always.

In most cases, the symptoms of RSV resolve in a few days and can be treated at home. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for RSV.

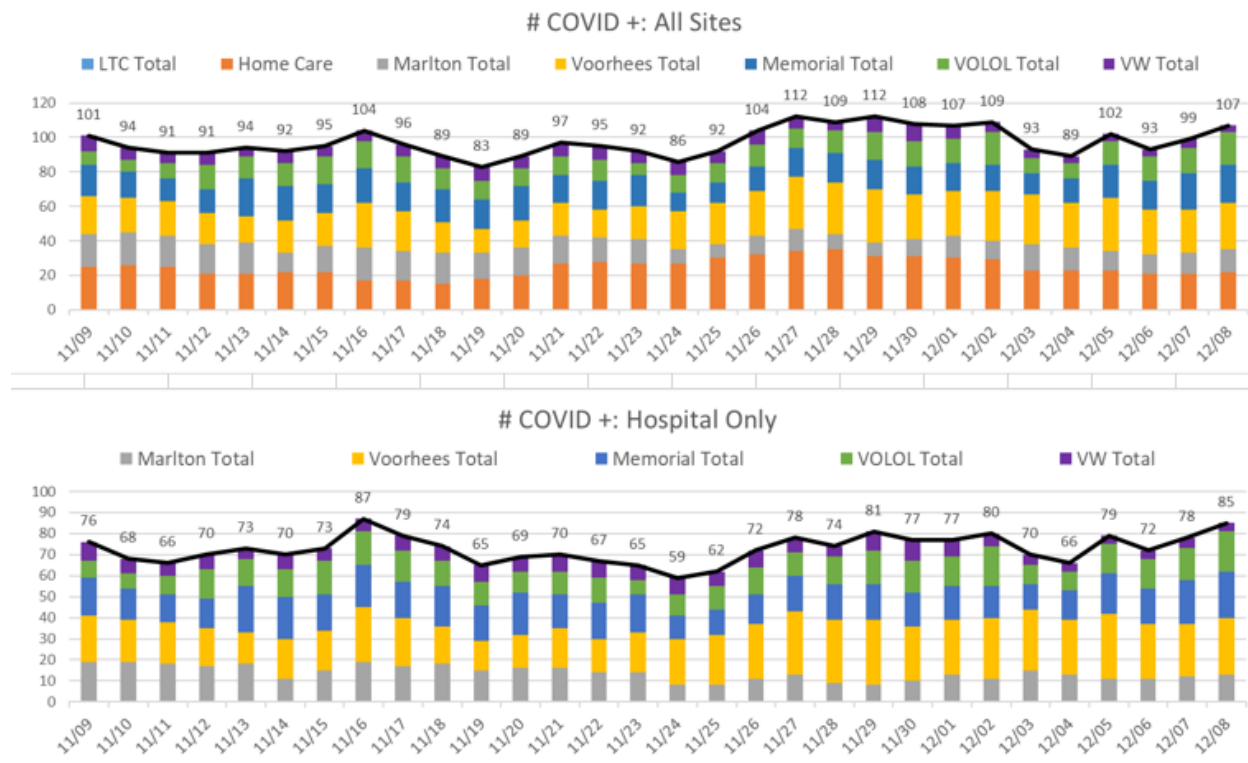
What can people do to protect themselves this winter?

My list of recommendations should not surprise anyone. Get your flu shot and COVID booster. Wash your hands often. Wear a mask in crowded places and when engaging with people who have compromised health. Stay home when sick. And drink plenty of fluids.

Any advice for the Virtua workforce specifically?

I have so much respect for our colleagues; they are truly incredible. As we look ahead to winter, I ask that we continue to think like a team and do what we can to protect ourselves and one another. One of the biggest challenges of the omicron surge last January was the high number of health care workers who were home sick and isolating at any given time. I know it’s easier said than done, but let’s do all we can to stay healthy so we can be there for each other.

COVID-19 Census



Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- The statewide rate of transmission was 1.61 when last reported by the Department of Health on Monday.
- The total number of cases reported as of 3 p.m. today:
 - Atlantic County 67,559
 - Burlington County: 108,099 cases
 - Camden County: 131,178 cases
 - Gloucester County: 66,758 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, Gloucester, and Atlantic counties: 4,977.
- The state’s Vaccination Overview dashboard reported 19,826,629 doses of vaccine have been administered.

Monkeypox Stats As of Wednesday’s weekly posting, the number of probable and confirmed cases of mpox cases in New Jersey: **762**.

Around the Health System

Discussing Cardiovascular Health and more

Howard M. Weinberg, DO, FACC, Virtua cardiologist and associate professor at the Rowan-Virtua School of Osteopathic Medicine, was the featured guest on a recent edition of [Inside Medicine](#) on WWDB-AM Talk 860. Dr. Weinberg talked of cardiovascular health, the usage of aspirin, statins, the benefits of inspiring exercise, and his work on the board of directors of the PAN Foundation. The foundation helps underinsured people with life-threatening, chronic, and rare diseases get the medications and

treatments they need by assisting with their out-of-pocket costs and advocating for improved access and affordability. The host of the program, Dr. Joseph J. Fallon, is the chief of endocrinology at Rowan-Virtua School of Osteopathic Medicine. To hear the program, [click here](#).

Scholarships Support the Future of the Nursing Profession

Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes School of Nursing recently held a reception to present five students with scholarships made possible thanks to the generosity of several caring donors. Each recipient demonstrated financial need, good academic performance, and a strong commitment to the field of nursing. During the reception, each student had the opportunity to meet with the donors and share how the scholarships will help them reach their goal of becoming professional nurses.

- The Franklin Andaloro Strive for Excellence Scholarship was presented to Anthony Mangini.
- The Randle Nursing Education Scholarship was presented to Luis DeLeon.
- The Bill and Kathie Stone Scholarships were presented to Luisa Alvarado and Johanna Irizarry.
- The Linda Wray Scholarships were presented to Luis DeLeon and Kayla Miller.

Learn more about our efforts to support students and Virtua nurses through scholarships [here](#).

Virtua Receives Hundreds of Holiday Toys

Children who require hospital care during the holiday season have reason to smile thanks to the Joseph Lacroce Foundation. The not-for-profit organization held its 11th annual toy delivery on Dec. 3. Organizers and volunteers received and sorted toys for children of all ages and interests at Virtua Voorhees Hospital. The hundreds of toys delivered will be distributed to hospitalized children throughout Virtua in the weeks ahead.

Contribute to Virtua's Healthy Cookbook: Share your recipes by Friday, Dec. 16

In the spirit of the holiday season, the 303 Lippincott Drive/Howard Boulevard RISE Team invites you to send healthy, family-favorite recipes. The recipes will be part of a Virtua Health cookbook, which will be available to all colleagues in 2023. Click to [submit the recipe for your tasty dish](#). Click to [view the flyer](#).

WE THRIVE: Focusing on Our Spiritual Well-Being

At Virtua, colleague well-being is a priority. The [WE Thrive](#) page provides resources supporting the six key areas of well-being: physical, emotional, social, financial, spiritual, and intellectual.

This month, we focus on spiritual well-being.

Life is truly a journey of ups, downs, and unexpected surprises. Along the way, our unique experiences guide us toward our purpose; help us form meaningful connections with others; and teach us resiliency in different environments.

However, with the hustle and bustle of life, it may not be easy to pause and discover the right path. One tip is practicing mindfulness: being present in the moment; being aware of your feelings; and taking note

of your surroundings. Adopting this practice can help you feel more relaxed and connected to your personal journey.