

Clinician Update

July 21, 2022

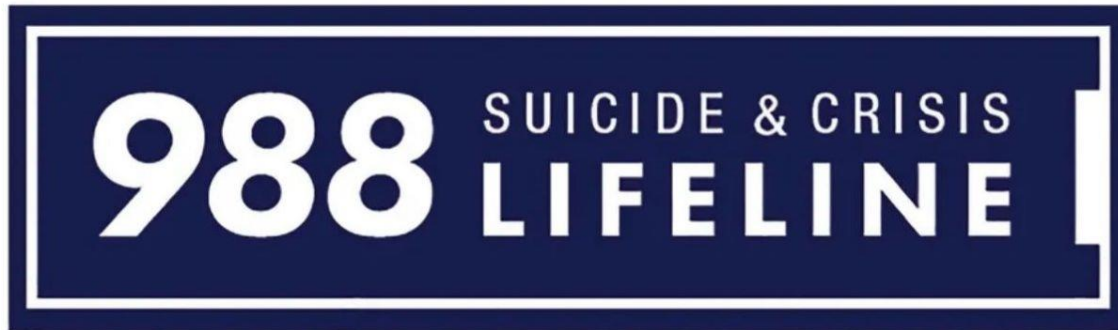
Town Hall on Monkeypox Now Available

Yesterday, Virtua hosted a clinician town hall for affiliated primary care, urgent care, and emergency room clinicians to share the latest information on monkeypox—how it spreads, and how it's treated. Attendees heard important safety recommendations and operational updates, and also had the opportunity to ask questions. Dr. Jennifer Khelil, chief medical officer of Virtua Health, emceed the event, and was joined by Dr. Martin Topiel, chief of infection control; Jennifer Sneddon, director of epidemiology; and Dr. Sam Weiner, vice president and chief medical officer of Virtua Medical Group. As this is an emerging topic in medicine, [we are sharing the 45-minute recording here.](#)

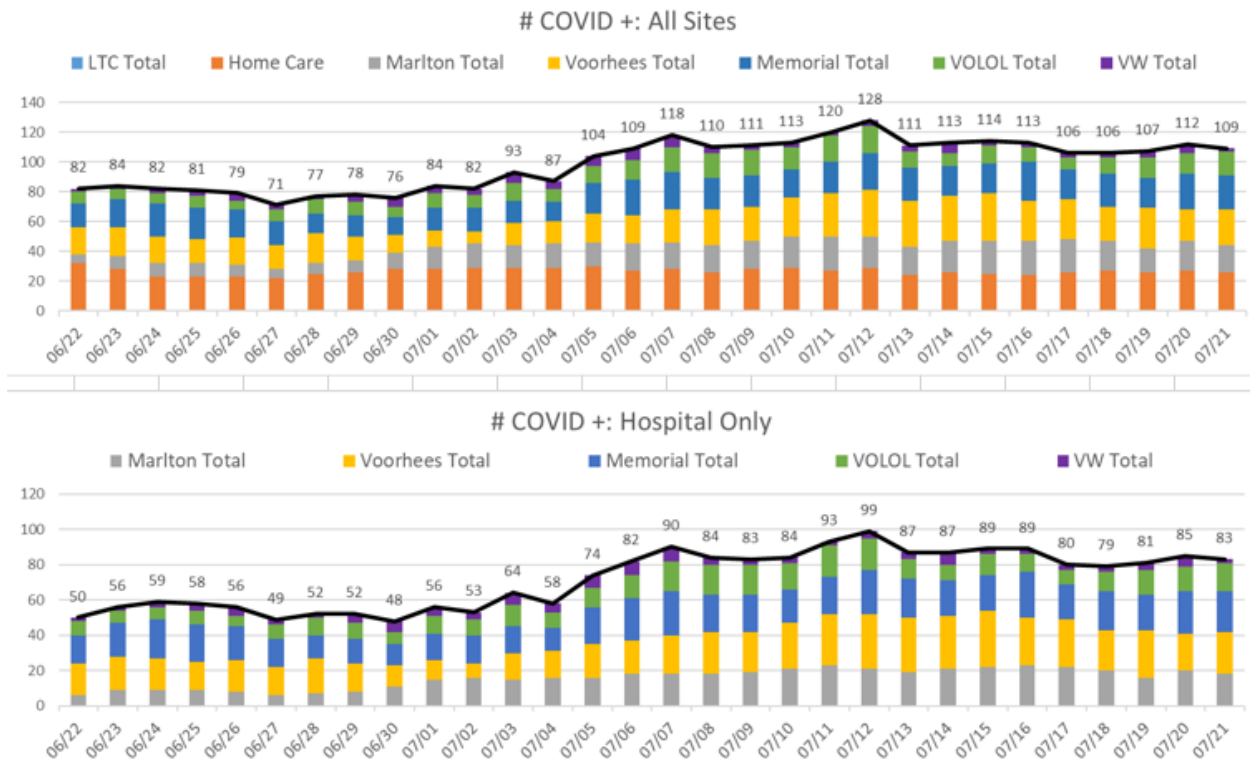
National Suicide Phone Code Now in Effect

As of July 16, **9-8-8** has been designated as the dedicated three-digit dialing code to route Americans to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This number can be used to call, text, or chat and will connect individuals with trained counselors who can provide immediate support and resources.

For more information about the Lifeline, visit [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#).



COVID-19 Census



Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- The rate of transmission in New Jersey was reported yesterday as 1.09.
- The total number of cases reported as of 3 p.m. today:
 - Atlantic County 61,555 cases
 - Burlington County: 96,544 cases
 - Camden County: 117,331 cases
 - Gloucester County: 60,547 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, Gloucester, and Atlantic counties: 4,769.
- The state’s Vaccination Overview dashboard reported 18,281,810 doses of vaccine have been administered.

Coronavirus Q&A with Dr. Martin Topiel

With COVID-19 cases again on the rise, we asked Dr. Martin Topiel, chief of infection control, to answer some common questions from colleagues and the community.

What is this latest variant all about? The variant everyone is talking about – Omicron BA.5 – makes up almost 80 percent of the COVID cases in the United States right now according to the CDC. Cases are up significantly, and I believe any numbers you read are likely an under-count – perhaps as much as 10-fold – because we have no way of counting all the people who test positive using at-home tests.

We’ve said from the start that viruses will mutate to survive, and this strain is proving that. The good news is that people who are vaccinated are, generally speaking, less likely to get severely ill, and that’s because the vaccine still is effective against the infection and in reducing severity of illness.

Is BA.5 more contagious than past strains of COVID? Am I protected if I've already had COVID? BA.5 is the most transmissible COVID variant to date, and prior infection of other strains does not seem to lower your chances of getting this strain. There are people who have developed COVID a second (or even third!) time just a few weeks after the initial infection with other strains.

I'm troubled by new [research from UC Davis](#) indicating that repeated COVID infections may lead to increased risk for other health concerns like stroke, heart attack, kidney disorders, and even long-term cognitive impairment. We can't write off COVID in this stage as simply a "bad cold;" we are still learning about its long-term health effects.

Should we start wearing masks again in stores, airports, and other places? Frankly, I never stopped wearing my mask indoors. The CDC recommendations are to mask indoors in geographic areas where there are high cases counts. For us, that includes Burlington and Camden County.

For most of us, a mask is a mild inconvenience at most. I'd rather put up with the mask than get COVID, feel lousy, worry about long-term consequences, and miss out on important things in life. The transmission to other family members, to immunocompromised people, and to those with disabilities is a respectful concern. We all know people who had to cancel a vacation because someone in their household came down with COVID. Maybe you've heard about a parent missing a child's wedding because they tested positive a day before the event. That's why it makes sense to play it safe as best we can.

How reliable are at-home tests? At-home tests are a tremendous resource, and I recommend people take advantage of the [free rapid tests](#) you can get through the federal government. There is always the possibility that a low viral load at the time of the test could result in a false negative. So if you have symptoms or a known exposure, self-test more than once or get a PCR test for extra data.

Testing before travel or a large gathering is a way we can demonstrate courtesy to one another. You can also test before spending time with someone who is high-risk.

If you feel sick but your COVID test comes back negative, you should still stay home and isolate. It may be COVID or it may be something else, but it's better to not expose people to whatever the culprit might be.

Should people who are eligible for a vaccine booster wait until the manufacturers release an Omicron-specific version? Health officials are urging people who are eligible for a booster to get a booster. You don't want to miss an opportunity to protect yourself while waiting for another to come along. Health authorities are suggesting that getting a booster now will not "disqualify" someone from getting a new type of booster should they become available in the fall. Always consider your personal risk issues, gatherings, and travel when making these decisions.

Although COVID cases are up sharply, it does not seem that hospitalizations and deaths are rising as significantly. Why is that? Vaccinated people tend not to get as sick because of the immunity boost that vaccines provide. Additionally, we have treatment options like Paxlovid, an oral pill, that can help high-risk people from progressing to more severe illness. Deaths are still occurring, particularly among the elderly, but at a lower rate than previously.

While some people have symptoms that come and go quickly, others don't. I hear about those from people who do, in fact, suffer. I'd like to offer a few words of caution. One: hospitalizations tend to be a "lagging" indicator, meaning that it may be premature to think that we won't see another uptick in COVID hospitalizations – that could be heading our way in the next few weeks.

I also would not recommend people dismiss BA.5 as a "milder" form of COVID. That may be the case for some, but you have no way of knowing if it will be the case for you. Even people who have relatively average infections can encounter lingering symptoms, often referred to as "long COVID."

If I can make a gambling metaphor, your odds may be better than they were before, but you still don't want to roll the dice when it comes to your health and the health of your family and friends.

Register Today: Cardiology for Primary Care Sept. 10 (In-Person Event)

Join us for the 12th Annual Cardiology for Primary Care Symposium, a continuing medical education program offering a maximum of 5 AOA Category 1-A/5 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™. The program will be held in person at Rowan College at Burlington County (with a livestream option).

This year's agenda includes presentations on: Cardiac monitoring; structural heart and TAVR; chest pain in children and adolescents; cardiac rehab; heart failure medications; geriatric cardiology; peripheral vascular assessments and the cardiovascular effect and impact from tobacco use.

After two years of remote learning, the program is now back to a live event to be held at Rowan College at Burlington County in Mount Laurel. (Masking and other COVID cautions will be in effect.) [Register now](#). Questions? Email VirtuaClinician@virtua.org

WE Can Make a Difference

The Virtua Medical Group (VMG) RISE team recently hosted a canned food drive, titled *WE Can Make a Difference*, to benefit the Eat Well Food Farmacies. VMG colleagues from various practices participated and filled more than 40 boxes with canned food. The RISE team delivered them to the Eat Well distribution site in Voorhees.

Caring Support Inspires Gratitude after Loss

When Jess and JP Loggia experienced the loss of their newborn daughter, Emerson Rae, earlier this year, they felt moved to express gratitude for the compassionate support provided by the team at Virtua Voorhees Hospital. JP's sister, Laura, swung into action, collecting funds from family and friends who wanted to make a difference in Emerson's memory.

The Loggia family's gift to Virtua memorializes Emerson Rae, benefiting the Angel Garden on the Virtua Voorhees campus. Philanthropic support of this peaceful sanctuary is so meaningful, helping to bring peace to families who visit to remember their little ones.

The gift is additionally made in honor of our colleague Ann Coyle, manager of Virtua's Perinatal Bereavement Program.

Through philanthropic gifts, including Run with the Docs, this program ensures that families who experience the loss of a pregnancy or an infant have access to a multi-disciplinary range of services that provide comfort and support during a very difficult time.

We extend the Loggia family our most sincere condolences on the loss of sweet Emerson Rae, and we are so very proud to recognize Ann as a Lasting Impact Project honoree for 2022.

Visit virtua.org/gratitude to learn more about how we invite our patients and community to make a lasting impact through philanthropy.



A Focus on Social 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 week, we focus on **social well-being**.

Practicing social well-being involves spending time with the ones you love. Having meaningful interactions with people important to us, like family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, provides a sense of purpose, belonging, and support that positively contributes to our overall well-being.

WE Thrive Tip: Digital Detox - Dedicate 30 minutes to an hour each day this week and turn off your electronic devices. Use this time to be present in life. Meditate, practice yoga, spend time in nature, or immerse yourself in any activity you find relaxing.

WE Thrive Observance - Sunday, July 24 is International Self-Care Day. The purpose of this special day is to promote the importance of self-care for one's overall health and well-being. The World Health Organization defines self-care as *"what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health and to prevent and deal with illness. It is a broad concept encompassing hygiene (general and personal), nutrition (type and quality of food eaten), lifestyle (sporting activities, leisure), environment (living conditions, social habits), socio-economic factors (income level, cultural beliefs) and self-medication."*

Clinicians serve their patients every day. It is important to take time to recharge. We encourage you to take some time to think about what self-care means to you, so that you may be well and stay well.