

Clinician Update September 16, 2021

COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters at Virtua

There is a lot of interest among our clinicians and colleagues regarding Virtua's plans for COVID-19 vaccine booster shots. Here is the latest:

Tomorrow, **Friday, Sept. 17**, the FDA will hold an advisory committee meeting that will likely result in approval to make the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (and at this time, only Pfizer) available as third doses—or “boosters”—to health care workers and others who received their initial vaccine series eight months ago or more. Our understanding is that the FDA will have another meeting, likely next week, to develop specific guidance on eligibility.

This planning is taking place while boosters have been available community-wide for immunocompromised individuals. Though that is the criteria, it is not one that is being queried or challenged when presenting to providers who are offering boosters—mostly retail outlets like CVS and Walgreens.

Virtua recognizes the high interest and eagerness of clinicians, many of whom received the vaccine in December and January. At this time, Virtua leadership will look to tomorrow's FDA meeting outcome for direction, and if approval is granted, will initiate emails and alerts via MyChart to notify eligible colleagues to prompt them to schedule a booster appointment at the HEC. To ensure you receive updates and info in a timely manner, [log on to MyChart](#), or use the mobile app to verify your settings. Select *Menu > Communication Preferences* to learn more.

The plan would be to send messages thereafter, likely weekly, as persons become eligible based on their second vaccination date. **An important caveat is that this plan is based on the assumption the FDA will endorse boosters at eight months.**

Looking ahead, we anticipate appointment availability at the HEC will be limited, so Virtua is comfortable with third doses being completed at retail locations in the community. Should the state open a new mega-site— or even a “mini mega-site”— in the near future, we may instruct colleagues and non-colleagues alike to go to that location for their booster instead of the HEC in order to maximize efficiencies and promote resource stewardship.

No matter where you receive your dose, **remember to bring your vaccination card** with you so it may be updated. Vaccination cards are becoming increasingly important as a type of passport to activities as travel and events open up.

Regarding the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) Boosters

Although the White House has endorsed making additional shots of the Moderna vaccines available to eligible individuals, that plan has not been evaluated and approved by the FDA or the CDC. When such approval is granted, Virtua will ensure booster vaccines are available to colleagues who previously received the Moderna vaccine.

As for the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the company is similarly developing plans to make a booster dose available to recipients. However, there is no set timeframe for when that will become a reality.

Mixing Manufacturers

To date, officials recommend vaccine recipients stick to the version of the vaccine they received initially. That said, health experts agree there is unlikely to be an adverse effect to “mixing and matching,” but stress the importance of having data and evidence before taking action.

In June, the National Institutes of Health announced it had launched a clinical trial in which people who received one type of the vaccine receive a different vaccine type several months later. At that time, Dr. Anthony Fauci said, “The results of this trial are intended to inform public health policy decisions on the potential use of mixed vaccine schedules should booster doses be indicated.”

We will continue to keep you updated as more information unfolds.

Vaccine History with Dr. Martin Topiel

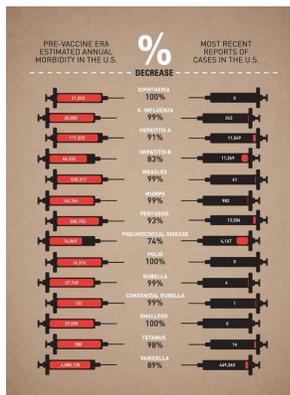
When considering the complex and varied views people have regarding vaccines, Dr. Martin Topiel, Virtua chief of infectious diseases, recommends looking to history for guidance.

“New vaccines are often controversial in their time,” he says. “But when we look back at the impact they have—how they eradicated diseases that once debilitated or killed by the thousands—we have better context for this moment in time.”

Dr. Topiel cites polio as an example. Before a vaccine became available in the 1950s, polio paralyzed an average of 15,000 Americans per year and claimed the lives of many children. Thanks to vaccination, polio has been nonexistent in the U.S. for more than 40 years. According to healthgrades.com, incidence of polio has decreased 99 percent worldwide—a triumph for public health.

“The [CDC reported](http://CDC) 350,000 cases of polio globally in 1988. By 2013, that number plummeted to 403 cases. Progress like that doesn’t just happen. It requires everyday people to step up and make the decision to protect themselves,” Dr. Topiel says.

In February 2013, long before COVID-19, *Forbes* magazine created this [infographic](#) (below) to illustrate the effectiveness of vaccinations, based on data reported in the *Journal of American Medical Association*.

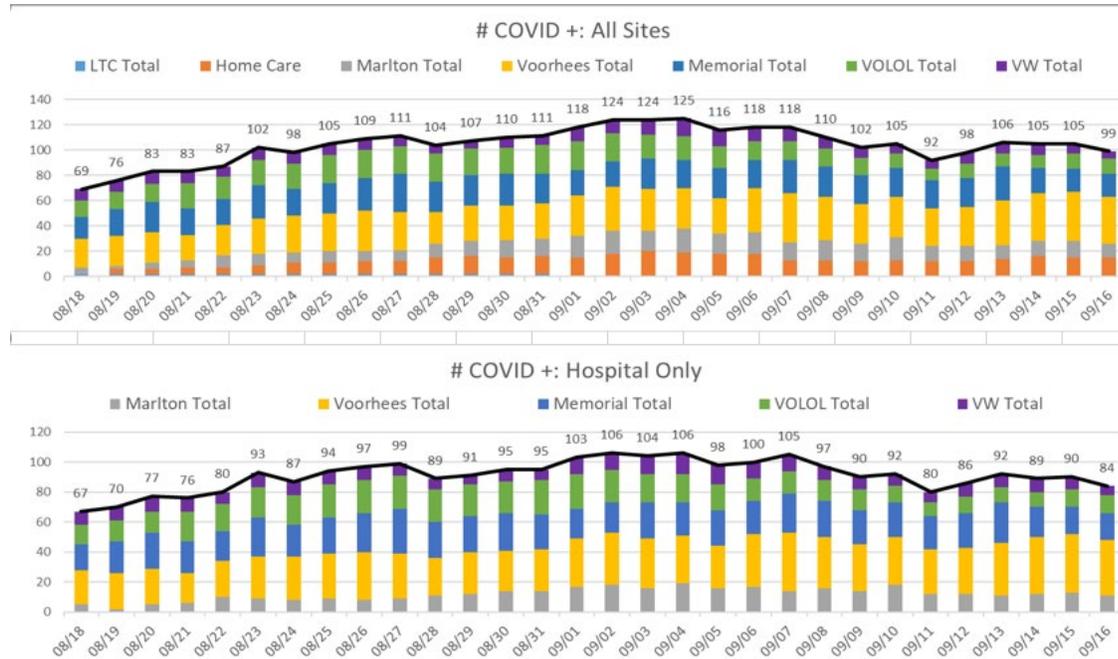


“I remember when the World Health Organization declared [smallpox had been eradicated in 1980](#). It was a major victory for the planet,” Dr. Topiel recalls. “There is evidence that that disease had existed for thousands of years, claiming too many lives to count, and yet modern medicine found a way to stop it for good.”

For these reasons, and others, Dr. Topiel encourages everyone to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

“Past generations had to wait in vain for cures to come around. Today, we already have the tools to stop COVID-19, but it is the ultimate group effort,” he says. “Everyone must play their part for this to work.”

COVID-19 Census



Latest COVID-19 Fast Facts

- The rate of transmission in New Jersey is now 1.05.
- The total number of cases as of 3 p.m. are as follows:
 - Burlington County: 42,732 cases
 - Camden County: 54,371 cases
 - Gloucester County: 29,807 cases
- COVID-associated mortality for Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester counties: 2,729.
- The state’s Vaccination Overview dashboard reports 11,457,302 doses of vaccine have been administered.
- According to [data from Johns Hopkins](#), one in every 500 Americans has died from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic 18 months ago.
- The New Jersey Hospital Association reported yesterday that the Delta variant responsible for 99% of new cases in the state’s samples.

Virtua Remembers 9/11

Last Saturday marked the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. For many years, a bronze statue of a businessman sifting through a briefcase—called “Double Check”—occupied a bench in a plaza near the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Miraculously, the statue remained largely intact during and after the attacks on 9/11, and the art piece became a makeshift memorial.

In 2004, [the New York Times](#) wrote, “This sculpture became an icon, as newspaper and magazine photos showed it covered erect in ash and, later, by flowers, notes, and candles left there by mourners and rescue workers. ‘Double Check’ was a memorial to all those who perished. It was also a fitting metaphor for the city: though the sculpture had been knocked loose from its moorings, it had endured.”

Among the tributes: a Virtua EMS patch left by one of the many colleagues who supported the rescue and recovery effort.

The statue’s creator, J. Seward Johnson Jr., felt compelled to make a new version of “Double Check” that included the added adornments. The modified version—named “Makeshift Memorial”—resides at [Grounds for Sculpture](#) in Hamilton Township, Mercer County. When you visit, look for the Virtua badge and take a moment to appreciate the Virtua colleagues and brave people across the region who responded without hesitation when their services were needed.

Virtua ASCs Named to *Newsweek* List

Through its partnerships with 27 ambulatory surgical centers (ASCs), Virtua provides vital outpatient services to communities across New Jersey, and even into the neighboring states. According to a recent survey published by *Newsweek*, 12 of these ASCs are among the best in the nation.

“Our experts and our survey participants assessed quality of care, performance data, and peer recommendations relative to in-state competition. They also took into account how well facilities were responding to the threat of COVID-19,” said Nancy Cooper, global editor-in-chief for *Newsweek*, in the [online report](#).

In total, 28 New Jersey ASCs appear on the list—meaning Virtua is affiliated with 43 percent of these high-performing facilities (listed below).

“Virtua’s name does not appear on most of these buildings, and yet our partners all share our trusted principles of quality, safety, and experience,” said Barry Graf, senior vice president of partnerships and business development. “Ambulatory surgery centers are a vital service to the community and a key part of our portfolio. We are proud to have exceptional partners providing exceptional care throughout the region.”

Virtua congratulates the following ASCs:

- Ramapo Valley Surgery Center (Ramsey)
- Center for Surgery Washington Township
- Surgical Center of South Jersey (Mount Laurel)
- The Endo Center at Voorhees
- Emmaus Surgical Center (Hackettstown)
- Advanced Surgical Institute (Turnersville)
- Memorial Ambulatory Surgery Center (Mount Holly)
- Surgicare of Central Jersey (Watchung)

- Summit Surgical Center (Voorhees)
- Jersey Shore Ambulatory Surgical Center (Somers Point)
- Gastro Surgi Center of New Jersey (Mountainside)
- Center for Ambulatory and Minimally Invasive Surgery (Eatontown)

[Click here to consult the full list.](#)

VIN Pharmacist Recognized

Congratulations to Ashley DePuy, PharmD, BCACP, ambulatory clinical pharmacist at Virtua Integrated Network (VIN), for being honored with the 2021 New Pharmacist Practitioner Award on behalf of the Temple University School of Pharmacy Alumni Association. The award recognizes her professional services that have resulted in a clear benefit to our patients and community.

The school bestowed the honor at its 2021 White Coat Ceremony, where Ashley also provided the welcome address. She highlighted the importance of pharmacists working as a team and finding ways to innovate in the presence of adversity. Even with the pandemic, she stressed how the VIN care coordination team was able to not only support the vaccination initiative, but also the physical and mental health of high-risk patients from their own homes through technology and telephone outreach. To view the ceremony (her speech is at the 36:00 minute mark), [click here](#).

As the following recent case exhibits, Ashley is a great example of how the role of the pharmacist remains ever important in clinical care.

Pharmacy recently received a referral for a patient with declining memory. The woman's husband, who serves as her primary caregiver, had been overwhelmed. The goal of this referral was to simplify the patient's medication regimen in order to alleviate the burden on her caregiver while they contemplated long-term care options. Upon reviewing medications, Ashley noted that the patient was on two similar medications for urinary incontinence. She expressed her concern to the patient's caregiver who was able to contact their urologist for further discussion. The urologist agreed with stopping one of the medications and upon discontinuation, the patient's behavior changed considerably. She became more alert, oriented, and active (now walking 1 mile a day). Due to having ample support from all of the members of the care coordination team and seeing such significant improvement, they are opting out of long-term care for the time being.

Great job, Ashley!

Virtua Team Honored for COVID-19 Response

The Burlington County Commissioners honored Virtua and the Burlington County Health Department for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Virtua team was well represented accepting the award, including Paul Sarnese, AVP of environmental, safety and security, integrated operations; Cort Adelman, VP of government relations; and Phyllis Worrell, emergency preparedness coordinator. Additionally,

Phyllis earned the [2021 Outstanding Women of Burlington County Award](#) for the category of Frontline Worker from the Burlington County Women's Advisory Council. Well done, Phyllis!

Virtua Earns Praise at Epic Annual Meeting

At the Epic Users Group Meeting held last month in Verona, Wisconsin, Virtua received high honors as one of the top 10 health systems nationwide in terms of efficient, effective hospital billing. This recognition—based on extensive revenue cycle data spanning several Virtua departments—reflects the teamwork and commitment of Virtua colleagues.

“This achievement is a testament to the entire Virtua staff, notably patient accounting, patient access, revenue integrity, IT, health information management, case management, managed care, and those who joined us following the Lourdes acquisition and quickly embraced Epic and adopted new policies and practices,” said Tom Buckley, vice president of revenue cycle. “This also demonstrates how well many of our team members adapted to working remotely because of the pandemic.”

Bob Segin, executive vice president and chief financial officer, said, “The essential work of our revenue cycle teams helps to secure funds for projects, programs, facilities, and staff across Virtua. I invite all colleagues to join me in applauding this accomplishment.”

Peddling for a Good Cause

Good luck to the Virtua clinicians and all Virtua members partaking in this Sunday's American Cancer Society Bike-A-Thon. They are up for their chosen 20 to 100-mile journeys in person between the Ben Franklin Bridge and Bader Field, Atlantic City, or virtually, (indoors and/or outdoors).

Annually, the local cycling charity ride circuit has become a worthwhile venue for some Virtua clinicians to get out and peddle various distances and courses.

Dr. Mary Campagnolo, medical director Virtua Medical Group Value Based Programs and family physician at Primary Care of Mansfield, and chair of the Department of Family Medicine at Virtua Mount Holly, is a regular at many of these events. “I ride about 1,500 miles a year, and the fall season is my favorite time to bicycle. I just love getting out and taking on the challenge, and it's always wonderful when you can do it as part of a team, plus raise funds for health care causes.”

If you think you'd be up for such riding events, here's an open invitation. Virtua colleagues and friends often ride together at many of the local cycling events, some of which Virtua is proud to sponsor, including the American Cancer Society Bike-A-Thon. The National MS Society City to Shore Bicycle tour is the weekend of **Sept. 25-26**. To learn more about our group and year-round opportunities to ride together, please email Andrew Giordano at AGiordano@virtua.org.