

VMS Notes on Governor Scott Press Conference from Tuesday 4.20.21

Mike Pieciak - DFR modeling update

- https://dfr.vermont.gov/sites/finreg/files/doc_library/dfr-covid19-modeling-042021.pdf
- “really optimistic” picture for upcoming weeks and months
- Steady decline in cases – “we are now moving in the right direction”
- On track to meet May 1 goal of Vermont Forward plan
- 797 new cases: 252 fewer than last week
- 7 day case rate down 24%
- Continue to be a leader in testing per capita
- Younger demographics are primary reason why cases are dropping – down 33% over 2 weeks
 - Down on college campuses
 - Likely not the result of vaccination – just opened to this age band
 - Likely due to behavioral changes – more outdoors, more cautious
- 11/14 counties seeing case decreases
- Forecast: cases expected to decline in the coming weeks
- Still see encouraging uptake in vaccine – expect to have enough demand and supply to meet reopening targets in VT Forward plan
- Hospitalization: fairly stable rates – expect to decline further once 50-64 year olds are increasingly vaccinated
- Fatalities down compared to March, expect to trend down in weeks and months to come

Jenney Samuelson – AHS update on vaccinations

- Yesterday reached milestone of every Vermonter 16+ eligible
- 47,000 individuals 16-29 have made an appointment – 40% of that age group
- BIPOC gap closing – 18,000 have made appointments and/or have been vaccinated in this population

Mark Levine

- Continues positive theme – continue to see downward trend in cases
- Positivity rate had crept down to 1.5%
- Testing still going well in VT – had a high of 19,000 tests run in one day – unimaginable compared to last year when there weren’t enough supplies or capacity – VTers being willing to be tested has made a difference
- Testing is still highly accessible, free, available
- Vaccine breakthrough cases
 - There will be some people who still get sick even with vaccine working as expected
 - No vaccine is 100% effective
 - As of April – CDC data – 17m people fully vaccinated since Dec – 5,814 reports of vaccine breakthrough infections – 104 cases in Vermont (up to 125 now) - .007% as rate of breakthrough
 - In all ages, 29% had no symptoms, 396 (7% with breakthrough cases) were known to be hospitalized, 74 (1%) died
 - We do know this is not full data, not everyone is getting tested, but these are still rare events

- Evidence is quite clear that cases are more mild in those who are vaccinated
- Pfizer has applied for approval for those 12-15 – Phase 3 trials showed vaccine is safe and nearly 100% effective in this age group; if approved might allow to vaccinate as soon as May or June

Q: what should VTers do who are waiting for J&J, what is the timeline? ML: ACIP meeting this Friday 11-5 so don't expect an update until later that day, but we do expect a decision that day. Perhaps a few other cases have come in – they are reviewing the data. If pause is stopped on Friday – we don't know if it will move forward for everyone – or if they will say some portion of population should no longer get the vaccine – but should remain optimistic that pause will end

Q: with vaccine opened up to so many people, when are they getting scheduled? Are we ramping up more? We have heard some appointments 6-7 weeks out ML: some of this depends on how much vaccine is coming into the state; JS: availability really depends what comes into the state; across the state there is availability starting in mid-May except Grand Isle (and adding a clinic there); if your appointments are further out than mid-May, continue to look, don't forget to look at the pharmacies – CVS opens appointments every day; MP: this is actually good news that there is so much demand in VT – it means people want to get vaccinated here

Q: does the wait for the appointment make people so frustrated they give up? MP: survey data still shows VT with highest interest in getting vaccinated; people have been waiting months & months – this is just a bit longer

Q: can ML speak to vaccine hesitancy once J&J is back available? ML: he has heard much frustration about the pause; we heard initially there might be hesitancy because of 70% efficacy – but demand has been very high; has also been very high in more diverse urban areas – people are very disappointed they can't get it – don't think there will be much hesitancy; also think youth might really like 1 dose option

Q: has state seen multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children? ML: no, we thought there might be 1 case but CDC found it did not meet the criteria

Q: vaccination in 12-15 year olds – if by May or June – would we have supply for this? ML: yes, by that point we actually think supply might exceed demand – being told Pfizer and Moderna continue to ramp up substantially and will be seeing more by each state; in VT this is about 22,000 youth

Q: dashboard on state website vs % of Vermonters vaccinated on VT Forward plan seem to look different? MP: you can measure against those eligible (just over 16) vs all Vermonters being vaccinated

Q: what about booster shots? We are starting to hear about this from Pfizer & Moderna? Will state infrastructure and messaging stay in place? ML: Yes, we do have ongoing VDH immunization program that is permanent; structure to administer vaccines – there will be a big transition sometimes after July 4 date so primary care community has more opportunity to give vaccine – does depend on which vaccine and storage requirements – if you are waiting to get from your own doctor this still won't happen right away; if we will continue to need large vaccination sites when it's time for a booster – we don't know that yet

Governor Scott joins call after being on White House call

- This week state supply will be level; federal pharmacies will see slight increase (8000 doses for VT)

- J&J does continue to manufacture – so state should be able to receive doses as soon as pause is lifted

Q: Do we really need to keep wearing masks outside, as sports games, etc? PS: Yes, we still have the mandate for now but will be reexamining outdoors over next few weeks

Q: how should the business community deal with vaccinated & unvaccinated public coming in this summer? What about people who are not wearing masks? ML: we have given businesses flexibility to deal with this; we will see this difference between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals across the country and world; at some point it will be individually choice/risk analysis of what situations they want to be in; PS: we don't envision having a mask mandate by July 4 – and we may be consider lifting it earlier outside – “we will discuss this further”

Q: do we still see registrations in people in older age brackets? PS: yes, it continues to increase each week; MP: yes, continue to see strong week over week increases even in groups where registration has been open

Q: what about herd immunity? Do we need to worry if VT has high rates but other states do not? MP: still data to come on how “local” or “regional” herd immunity can be – we know VT is likely to have very high rates as with other New England states

Q: what is public education going to look like “post pandemic”? What changes have we made in education that might stick around? Dan French: we are starting to learn from our experience, how we have used technology, especially as a rural state – can we expand offerings across the state?