VMS Notes on Governor Scott Press Conference from Tuesday 4.20.21

Mike Pieciak - DFR modeling update
- “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

Jenny 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?