

Dear Colleagues,

The following is a summary of a recent national health care webinar that I participated in on March 23 regarding COVID-19, seasonal influenza, and measles. This is the 25th update and the 4th year of COVID-19.

COVID-19

As of March 15, the COVID-19 subvariant JN.1 still represents over 85% of all cases, with emerging subvariant JN.1.13 steadily increasing from 9.5%. Subvariants HV.1 and BA.2.86 represent under 1% of all reported cases. The CDC recommends that all adults over the age of 65 should obtain one additional booster for spring protection. CDC has also shortened the recovery time for individuals testing positive for COVID-19 to 24 hours after the individual is fever-free with symptom reduction (without the aid of fever-reducing medications). Individuals who meet this standard can resume normal activities.

Long-COVID remains a major health care issue for many in the U.S. Reported percentages of Long-COVID range from 1.9% (U.S. Virgin Islands) to 10.6% in West Virginia. States reporting the highest percentages are: Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Alabama, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The current national average is 6.4%.

Over 1 million U.S. residents reported having serious difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions. Impaired memory, reasoning, and executive function are correlated with brain fog. COVID reinfection contributed to an additional loss of 2 IQ points when compared to individuals with no reinfection. Vaccinations provided a small cognitive advantage. MRI results revealed damaged white matter in the brain tissue of individuals reporting persistent symptoms involving autonomic functioning and physical conditioning, resulting in chronic fatigue. In addition, laboratory studies indicate that the COVID virus directly infects atherosclerotic plaques in coronary arteries, producing a persistent inflammatory response in COVID patients.

Seasonal Influenza

Recent reports from patients experiencing seasonal influenza, primarily Influenza A, indicate symptoms and resulting health conditions similar to COVID-19 patients. Reports of migraine, movement disorders, neuropathy, epilepsy care, and stroke were higher in individuals experiencing seasonal influenza (A, B or RSV) than COVID patients. Influenza A was the most prominent strain within the past two months, moving from the southern U.S. to the mid-west impacting 10.6% of the population in those regions.

Measles

There has been a global increase of measles cases worldwide in the past year, an 18% increase or nearly 9 million cases, with death rates up 43% to 136,000 individuals when

compared to 2021. Children, particularly under the age of 5, are at the greatest risk of complications from measles, including pneumonia, encephalitis, and death. In 2021 nearly 40 million children in the U.S. missed measles vaccine doses, 25 million missed their first dose and 14.7 million missed their second dose. Average coverage with measles vaccine decreased to 93.1% for the 2022-2023 school year from 95.2% for the 2019-2020 school year. The reduction in vaccinations has left some 250,000 kindergartners susceptible to measles exposure each year over the last three years. The disease spreads by respiratory aerosols. Two vaccines, MMR-II and Priorix are FDA approved for individuals 12 months and older and the ProQuad-MMRV (Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella Virus Vaccine) for children 12 months through 12 years of age. These vaccines have proven effective against the disease for some time.

Cats and COVID

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) is a coronavirus infection found in cats. This is not the same SARS-CoV-2 virus found in humans. FIP is serious and may be fatal in cats. However, when treated with remdesivir (Veklury) or molnupiravir (Lagevrio), mortality can be reduced in 84% of cases.

Microplastics

Of concern to many scientists is the prevalence of microplastic substances (bisphenols and phthalates) found in human tissue. Microplastics are found in foods, especially highly-processed foods, packaging, and even soil. Recent studies of cardiac patients indicated concentrations of polyethylene and polyvinyl chloride in carotid artery plaque, linked to higher risks of myocardial infarction and stroke. These chemicals can also interfere with the production and regulation of human hormones, contributing to a host of health care issues, including diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. Reducing exposure to foods with high concentrations of microplastics is a safe practice.

Prevention and Self Care

Immunization, preventive health strategies, and effective personal hygiene remain the most prudent and effective ways to protect ourselves and our family members from disease and infection. Even after 4 years of COVID-19, we can still utilize the common sense approach to avoiding unnecessary risk, our challenge is remaining vigilant.