

County-USC officials raise questions about COVID surge during internal town hall



BY JEFF NGUYEN, CBSLA STAFF

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Officials from Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center raised questions about COVID hospital admission, as the region plans to reinstitute its mask mandate by the end of the month.

"Only 10% of our COVID positive admission are admitted due to COVID," said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brad Spelberg last week during a town hall meeting.

The L.A. County Department of Health Services, which runs County-USC, said the video was from an internal virtual town hall meant for staff but circulated online.

"Only 10% of our COVID positive admissions are admitted due to COVID," said Spelberg. "Virtually none of them go to the ICU, and when they do go to the ICU, it is not for pneumonia... They're not intubated."

During the meeting, he also presented a graph that showed case numbers have plateaued in the last two months.

"While we are not currently experiencing an increase in ICU admissions... we are seeing an increase in the number of infections among our patients, staff and the communities we serve," DHS wrote in a statement.

Emergency room physician at UCLA and Providence hospitals Dr. Angelique Campen said that many patients she has treated had COVID but it was not due to pneumonia or respiratory issues compared to earlier in the pandemic.

"The COVID illness is worsening underlying health problems," she said. "So, for example, if someone has diabetes, it's throwing their diabetes out of control. Or if they're having kidney problems, it's making their kidney function much worse."

The County-USC doctors with Spelberg raised issues with how the Department of Public Health has gathered and processed data on COVID hospitalizations but agreed with the DPH, DHS and Campen that the pandemic remains a serious threat.

"There's a lot of misinformation circulating about COVID, including at this point, it only causes mild illness," wrote DPH.

The number of deaths from COVID-19 has risen above 4,400 so far in 2022. Before the pandemic, L.A. County recorded an average of 1,900 deaths due to influenza or pneumonia and about 2,000 accidental drug overdoses.

Officials continue to advise residents to get vaccinated to protect themselves and continued to support masking and social distancing.