

Coronavirus Update: Telebriefing for Institutes of Higher Education

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SITUATIONAL UPDATE (Gilchick)

- **COVID-19**

- LA County (LAC) is reporting 1,392 additional cases of COVID-19 and six additional deaths
- Past week, an average of 960 cases were reported per day. A small increase: 4%
- Hospitalizations continue to be a lagging indicator
- Average of 59 admissions/day: a slight decrease from previous week
- Per the CDC definition, LAC is designated in **LOW** level (this level for the past 9 weeks)
- Weekly case rate 65 cases/100,000
- We are optimistic about lower rates of transmission, we will continue to monitor for the next few weeks and be prepared for the very real possibility of changes
- In 2020 and 2021, there were significant surges in the fall and winter
- We've also seen a pattern of cases associated with new variants or subvariants that can challenge our immunity
- Increases in cases in Europe often signal what will happen here in the U.S.
- Omicron BA.5 continues to be the dominant subvariant but it is accounting for smaller amounts of specimen sequences
 - There are several sublineages; many of them are BA.4. and BA.5
 - BA.7: now makes up the largest variant
 - BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 - both of these are currently at very low levels in LAC
 - However, CDC estimates that these variants combined account for nearly 17% of cases across the country

- **INFLUENZA**

- Already seeing signs of flu and other respiratory diseases, which create demand on ERs and hospitals
- Flu is tracked differently than COVID-19
 - Neither require mandatory reporting
 - Instead of tracking individual cases, we follow trends
- In LAC, the flu season officially starts when specimens testing positive reach 5%
- 2018-19 season started in December and peaked in February, with 17% of specimens testing positive
- In contrast, 2020 – flu season was different, started in November and rose sharply in January, with positivity at around 36%
- 2021: was extra unusual – essentially skipped
- 2021-22: flu season began in December 2021 as new Omicron was surging for first time; specimens testing positive fell below 5% for much of the winter
- Current flu season started at beginning of October
 - We have surpassed the 5% threshold; flu is increasing sharply; the earliest start to the flu season in past 5 years. We don't know what this means for the trajectory of the flu season (Gilchick)
- Getting vaccinated for flu is a good step in decreasing risk

- **RSV**

- RSV activity is unusually high
- It is very common
- RSV can be serious for older adults, young children
- Season usually starts in fall/early winter
 - 2020-21: essentially absent until summer of 2021, when COVID restrictions lessened
 - 2021-22: remained at a low level, before increasing in September
 - We are starting at a much higher level than usual
 - 12 percent are testing positive for RSV, which is quite high for October
- Current rates exceed the peak observed in 2019-20

STAYING HEALTHY: COMMON SENSE PRECAUTIONS

- Over 7M residents face waning immunity
- Getting boosted is likely to help keep many people out of hospitals, which can help prevent our health care system from getting overwhelmed
- Remember to wash hands frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing
- Masks remain an effective tool; indoor masking is a personal preference at this time in LAC
- Stay home if you have symptoms of respiratory disease
- Wipe down surfaces (a good practice for the winter)

CHANGES TO IHE GUIDANCE

- Exposure management plan
 - Live on website now
 - County has aligned its definition of close contact with state's definition of larger spaces vs smaller spaces
- General guidance for IHE
 - Updated masking guidance for indoor spaces (now it's a matter of personal preference)
 - Institutions should *consider* increased protections for sports and performing arts
 - For groups that are regularly together, regular screening should be *considered*

QUESTION AND ANSWERS

Q. ER declaration ending in Jan/Feb. If the emergency declaration does go away, what does it mean f?

A. When state declaration ends, there may be some reduction in fiscal resources made available to county. We don't really know. (Gilchick)

Q. Any thoughts on the getting rid of isolation protocols? We do not put people with RSV or the flu into isolation.

A. I don't think they will be going away, especially this season and in winter, when there may be a COVID surge. Isolating is what people should do and should have been doing for years. This is what the whole community should do to reduce the impact of respiratory illnesses. (Gilchick) Although we may see less transmission, that doesn't mean transmissibility is less. (El-Tobgy)

Q. Will contact tracing continue?

A. No one has a higher risk of being infected than people who are actually exposed to confirmed cases. When you do know, it seems reasonable to try and identify who those people are and let them know. If there's not contact tracing, then those people will never be informed. It seems sensible and reasonable to take those steps.

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