

*Update: November 3, 2020*

## **Stowe Personalized Medical Care**

### **Update for Patients of Stowe Personalized Medical Care from Dr. Bisbee**

**Are we out of the woods yet?** The last time I sent a newsletter (Monday 6-29-2020) there had been 1,208 cases of COVID 19 in Vermont and 56 deaths. In Lamoille County, there had been only 29 cases from the beginning of the Pandemic to June 30. The Vermont Department of Health reported 23 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, November 2, 2020. According to the data from the Health department, Vermont has identified 123 new cases in Chittenden County over the last 14 days. The county surpassed 1,000 total cases per day last weekend. In Vermont, the seven-day average percent positivity rate is 0.5% statewide.

In Lamoille County there were 4 cases of COVID in August and 17 in September and 3 in October. There have been a total of 2,219 cases in Vermont to date. Chittenden County accounts for 1,028 cases and Lamoille County has had 63 cases so far and one death.

COVID is starting a third wave in our country, and we are starting to see increased numbers here in Vermont. It is time to "double down" on CDC recommendations, wear masks, wash hands and try to keep at least 6 feet apart (10 feet is even better).

**What have we learned since March:** Masks, hand washing and socially distancing are most important. You don't need to wipe off groceries or keep them in a garage for 3 days. We have come a long way. Now we know that mask wearing is the main way we can defeat this virus. It looks like the COVID vaccine is months away and will not be generally available until spring or summer 2021. Even then mask wearing and keeping a safe distance will be important.

**Is everyone wearing a mask like the CDC recommends?** We all see people who refuse to comply with CDC recommendation and don't believe in wearing a mask. Mask wearing has become a partisan issue. At the end of June, 80 % of people in a New York Time survey reported they "wear a mask all or most of the time". By August 27, 2020, this increased to 85%, and on October a National Geographic survey reported 92% of Americans report they "wear a mask all or most of the time". There are still many places in the U.S. where a much smaller percentage of people wear masks. The percentage is growing but we will likely never reach 100%. Just like not all children receive the recommended vaccinations, and it is not likely that 100% of the country will accept the COVID vaccination. So what can you do? Wear your mask and stay a safe distance away from others and wash your hands as we wait for the rest of the country to comply with common sense and scientifically recommended recommendations.

We can get through this together and protect each other by wearing a mask and socially distancing and resist the temptation to be in large gatherings. It will become very hard to do this with the coming holidays.

**Vermont is doing well:** Maybe it is because we are a small state and we care about each other. Maybe because we don't have many concentrated population centers. Maybe it is our State's leadership. Maybe it is because we are following restrictions and recommendations. Keep it up. Encourage your family and friends to do the same.

**Restart Vermont Travel Restriction:** Travelers from "low risk counties" in other states can travel to Vermont without quarantining. For up to date information go to <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel>. Stay safe and wear masks and avoid close contact with others. If a business is not being safe, avoid that business. Do what you can to support local business but stay safe in the process.

**How can I get a COVID test?** Copley is now able to do their own in-house COVID tests. The turn-around time seems to be 24-48 hours. We can make arrangements for you to get a COVID test after we discuss your particular circumstances.

**The Guidance for Vermonters has not changed:**

1. If you have a medical emergency call 911 or go directly to the hospital.
2. If you are having even mild symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, call your health care provider and keep them updated if your symptoms worsen.
3. Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet, wash hands and wear a mask when near others.
4. Don't travel to counties with a high COVID rate. The map has been getting worse in the past 6 weeks. New Hampshire, Massachusetts and most of Maine are now orange or red (which means you must Quarantine if you arrive in Vermont from these counties. <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel>)

**Testing options:** The nasal swab PCR test is still the best test to get. The Antigen test is not reliable and has high false negative rate. Repeating a COVID test after you have been diagnosed with COVID is not recommended as this can be positive for a long time after having COVID. Antibody testing has not been shown to be reliable, reproducible and is difficult to make recommendations if positive. For instance, even if you are positive for IgG antibody, you may still be able to get a new infection of COVID 19. It is not recommended that Antibody status be used to make decisions regarding employment, travel or immunity at this time. You should work with your primary doctor to get the correct test.

**Should I put off my medical concerns?** It is not a good idea of putting off any significant medical concerns. Going to the hospital or emergency room for evaluation can be done safely at this time. However, in the next 60 days, this may change. Remember, you can always call Dr Bisbee on his cell phone for urgent problems. We are seeing patients in the office one at a time as long as you wear a mask, just like the staff. We ask you to wear a mask to keep Dr. Bisbee and the staff safe from catching COVID 19.

Because of the increase incidence of COVID in Vermont and New England, we will not be scheduling wellness exams and non-urgent medical visits until later this winter or next spring.

We expect the number of COVID cases to continue to rise. We encourage you to call us for any medical issues or any medical concerns.

**General recommendations:** Elderly patients should continue to stay at home as much as possible. Patients with chronic medical conditions and/or are over age 70 should be especially careful. A cloth mask is recommended when you are near other people (closer than 6 feet). You do not need to wear a mask when you are by yourself, in your car, or outside walking by yourself but have a mask handy if you are potentially coming within 6 feet of others. Washing hands, as much as possible, is recommended. Avoid touching your face, your eyes, nose with unwashed hands or gloves. Avoid contact with people that are sick. Wearing gloves is not a necessity. As soon as you touch something, the glove is just as contaminated as an ungloved hand.

**Symptoms to watch for:** Patients with confirmed COVID-19 infection have reported mild-to-severe respiratory symptoms (fever, cough and sore throat). Only about 50% of people with COVID have a fever at the time they are diagnosed. Other symptoms include fatigue, weakness, lethargy and headache. Diarrhea and gastro-intestinal symptoms can also be possible symptoms. Call to discuss your symptoms. Do not go to the hospital or emergency room before you call Dr. Bisbee.

**Office Hours:** The office is open 9:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday. Dr. Bisbee is available to help you if you need medical care. You should call ahead as many things can be taken care of by telephone. We call you ahead of your appointment to make sure you are not showing signs of infection. Dr. Bisbee and staff wear masks and only one patient is in the office at a time. We wipe down the exam room between each patient. We don't allow anyone to sit in the waiting room.

**Can I get a Flu shot?** Absolutely, you should call to make arrangements for your flu shot. We will come out to your car to administer your Flu shot at the time of your appointment.

**Staff are safe:** Dr. Bisbee and his staff are tested for COVID 19 on a monthly basis and as needed.

**Who should go to the Emergency Room?** If you have a life threatening medical issue such as a heart attack or stroke, call 911 without delay. If you are not having life threatening symptoms, call Dr. Bisbee first as he is available by phone 24/7. Patients in Lamoille County without a PCP can call Copley Hospital (802-888-8642) to discuss their individual situation.

**What activities can I do?** We are all getting very tired of isolating. It is getting tricky to figure out how to socialize with friends and family, especially now that outdoor dining is not an option. Family sometimes drive from out of state. Be aware of the Vermont Department of Health recommendations about travel restrictions.

Take a drive in the car, go outside and walk, weather permitting. With some imagination, you can organize a small social gathering with a few friends but you must be safe. Keep the 6 foot rule, (10 feet is even better) and think through how you will handle things like, bathroom availability, sitting arrangements, sharing (or not sharing) food to limit closeness. Lots to think about.