

Update: December 14, 2020

Stowe Personalized Medical Care

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

COVID-19 In Vermont: Latest Updates (from Vermont Public Radio)

This is from the daily report from VPR News | The Frequency thefrequency@vpr.org

- Cases: **5,541** (including **113 new cases** reported Friday, 12/11/2020)
Hospitalized: **26**, including **5** in the ICU.
- Percent positive seven-day average: **2.4%**
- Deaths: **93**

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Where is the post-Thanksgiving Surge? Congratulations Vermonters, Steve Levine MD, Vermont Commissioner of Health, reports that it looks like Vermont appears to have dodged the post- Thanksgiving Surge.

COVID is now into the "third wave" in the US. 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) while we get a vaccine into 60-70% of the US citizens.

For uptodate information about restrictions, regulations and mandates in Vermont go to: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19>

Help is on the way: The FDA advisory board gave approval to Pfizer for Emergency Use authorization (EUA) December 10, 2020. The FDA approved it and the CDC gave their approval. Yesterday, thousands of Pfizer vaccines were packaged up and the distribution was started. Vermont hopes to get the first vaccine by this Friday Dec. 18. The Pfizer vaccine is shipped in specialized containers that can keep the vaccine at a very cold temperature.

Copley Hospital hopes to get 725 vaccines in the first delivery. There is a detailed plan to vaccinate Copley Hospital direct Patient Care Staff and EMS Staff starting December 18. Lamoille Home Health Staff will be vaccinated next and then non-Hospital based direct Patient Care Staff (including Dr. Bisbee and his staff) will likely be vaccinated by the end of December.

All nursing homes in the state, including The Manor, will get a separate shipment, and this will be distributed by a pharmacy.

When will I be able to get a vaccine? This is the big question. The first shipment of Pfizer vaccine obviously won't cover everyone. It may not even cover all the people identified in the first Phase.

The Moderna COVID vaccine is scheduled for Emergency Use Approval (EUA) within the next couple of weeks. This will likely include the very elderly and the not so elderly that have underlying medical conditions.

SPMC is registered as a dispensing clinic for the COVID vaccine as we have met all the criteria including having an approved refrigeration system which is monitored for temperature fluctuation. Right before we receive notice that the vaccine will be arriving, we will immediately contact the appropriate class of patients to come in for the vaccine.

Once the vaccine is given to all Phase 1 people, the criteria will likely be (this has not been announced yet) (1) At risk elderly patients with chronic conditions (2) Other at risk patients with chronic conditions who are younger (3) Elderly without chronic conditions (4) All other patients. It is not clear whether patients under 18, patients who are pregnant, and other subgroups will be given the green light as there is not enough safety data to make that decision at this time.

Which vaccine should I get?: The answer to that is "the first one you can get" as there will not be an abundance of vaccines in early 2021, and it may take months for other doses to become available.

The government agreed to buy 100 million doses from Pfizer in July 2020, which falls short of the total number needed. Pfizer reports they will be able to fulfill the agreement to supply 100 million doses by March. The Government will likely be able to purchase more doses after that. Moderna, another pharmaceutical company making a COVID vaccine, is close behind and they hope to get EUA before the end of December.

What are the differences in the vaccines? : Pfizer vaccine will be two doses 21 days apart with a very narrow window for the second vaccine and it comes in a 5 dose multi-use vial. Moderna's recommendation for their vaccine is two injections 28 days apart and it comes in a 10 dose multi-use vial.

The US did not put all their eggs in one basket and instead invested in several vaccine options. The US has invested multi-millions of dollars to help companies ramp up development.

Besides purchasing vaccines from Pfizer, the US bought 100 million doses from Moderna. From Novavax, they paid \$1.6 billion dollars for 100 million doses when approved by the FDA. The US invested \$1.2 billion in AstraZeneca vaccine efforts in hopes of getting 300 million doses if the company gets FDA approval. The US paid \$2 billion to GlaxoSmithKline company in hopes of

eventually getting 100 million doses of vaccine. And from Johnson & Johnson, there is hopes of getting 100 million vaccines at a cost of \$1 billion.

Overall, fourteen out of hundreds of vaccines are showing promise. Several are in clinical trials and Pfizer and Moderna look like the first ones to be released. The fourteen vaccines are being narrowed down to 7 to speed the development. Large scale randomized trials for the demonstration of safety and efficacy will proceed for the top vaccine company candidates.

What about COVID treatment options? Besides vaccination development, Operation Warp Speed has also invested \$450 million in Regeneron antibody treatment of COVID. In August the FDA approved EUA for use of COVID convalescent plasma (which has not panned out to be that helpful). In October the HHS announced an agreement with AstraZeneca for late -stage development and production of AZD7442, a cocktail of two monoclonal antibodies that can be used to help prevent COVID. In October, HHS announced a \$375 million agreement with Elli Lilly to purchase doses of Balamivimab (LY-CoV555) monoclonal antibody treatment. Just to name a few.

For detailed summary of Development, manufacturing, distribution, I suggest going to <https://www.hhs.gov> and search for Fact Sheet: Explaining Operation Warp Speed. It is very detailed and has a very good summary of all the efforts of companies, scientists, and researchers' efforts since spring 2020.

None of these treatments are ready for general use, and several have research authorization and EUA for specific types of patients. Some show promise, while others are likely to be put into the "Hydroxychloroquine category". Scientists, drug companies, and researchers have pulled out the stops and our government has removed road blocks to move these efforts forward.

What have we learned since March: Masks protect you from getting droplets that can infect you, and it also protects the people that you come in close contact with from getting the virus from others. Even though the vaccine is coming soon, mask wearing, keeping a safe distance and washing hands is the main tool we have to stop the Pandemic.

The CDC recommends no travel, and we hope to avoid the Christmas surge just like Vermont avoided the Thanksgiving surge. The CDC also warns that college students should stay in place and not travel home. Anyone coming into Vermont should quarantine for 7 days and then get tested before they are around others or quarantine for a full 14 days.

What if I am exposed to a case of COVID? If you have been exposed to a known COVID case, it is recommended to get a test as soon as possible, then isolate from others and get a second test 7 days later. If both tests are negative then the quarantine can be lifted.

Definition of Quarantine: Can I fly back to Vermont and live with my parents until the 7 days of quarantining are done? Can I do a 7-day quarantine out of state and then not have to quarantine in Vermont? Can I drive up to Vermont without stopping and then I don't need to

quarantine? Can I rent an AirB&B in Vermont and just go to the grocery store and gas station and a few places until the 7 days are up? Specific questions should be discussed with Dr. Bisbee (or your own PCP). Most people realize that there are no "COVID police" to enforce compliance. Following the recommendations are voluntary and many are breaking the rules. There seems to be a "reality gap" when it comes to personal decisions regarding COVID. Please discuss your specific questions with Dr. Bisbee or other qualified Health Care Providers.

We can get through this together and protect each other by wearing a mask and socially distancing and resist the temptation to be in group gatherings. We all know this is a sacrifice and it is very hard to do this, especially during this traditional holiday season.

Where can I get a test for COVID? You need an order for most test sites so call Dr. Bisbee's office to get the order sent.

1. **Copley Hospital.** After the order is sent, we will tell you the procedures you need to follow to schedule the test. Testing has increased dramatically. The wait time for results can be 1-2 days or as long as 4-5 days depending on the volume of tests being collected.

2. **Kinney Drug, Morrisville** (as well as other locations) has partnered with UVM to offer COVID testing. This test is for testing asymptomatic community members for COVID 19 virus. Go to; <https://secure.kinneydrugs.com/pharmacy/covid-19/>. In our experience these testing sites are booking days to weeks out.

3. **Waterbury Ambulance Service**, 1727 Guptil Road, Waterbury Center. Set up your appointment by going to <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/testing/where-get-tested> For further information, contact Executive Director Mark Podgwaite at 802-244-5003. They encourage setting up an appointment but some have been able to drop in for a test.

4. **Walgreens on Susie Wilson Road, Essex Junction.** Call (802) 872-1800 to schedule the test. This is the self-administered anterior nasal swab test. They have appointments 7 days a week 9AM- 5PM. They are booking appointments several days out.

5. **Clear Choice**, 1200 Williston Road, Burlington. Call (802) 448-8205 to schedule an appointment, no referral needed. May take up to 10 days for results.

For other testing sites go to: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/testing/where-get-tested>

Restart Vermont Travel Restriction: All Travelers coming to Vermont must quarantine for 7 days and get tested. For up to date information go to <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel>.

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 ask if you should be tested. Keep your medical provider updated if your symptoms worsen.
3. Maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet, wash hands and wear a mask when near others, whether inside or outside.
4. Don't travel outside Vermont. <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel> and it is not recommended to travel within Vermont at this time.
5. Discourage family and friends from traveling to visit from outside Vermont

Testing options: The nasal swab **PCR test** is still the best test to get. The PCR test is used at most testing sites. The **Antigen test** ("quick test") can be used under certain circumstances. There are false negatives and false positives. If a person has a high likelihood of COVID and the antigen test is negative a PCR test is then recommended. If a person has no symptoms and the Antigen test is negative it is Very reliable that they do not have COVID.

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 even though you are not contagious.

Antibody testing has not been shown to be reliable, reproducible and it is not recommended to make recommendations based on the test results. 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 best correct test.

How long am I contagious after testing positive? The CDC says that concentrations of SAR-CoV-2 RNA start to decline after the onset of symptoms. Patients with mild-to-moderate symptoms should stay isolated for 10 days after the onset of symptoms. If you test positive for COVID but don't have symptoms, you are likely not contagious after 10 days. Patients who have moderate to severe COVID symptoms, a small fraction, are still contagious after 20 days. The PCR (nasal swab test) can be positive for a much longer time, and retesting is not recommended as a positive test after having COVID does not mean you are still contagious. Talk to your doctor for specific recommendations for your situation.

Should I put off my medical concerns? It is not a good idea to put off any significant medical concerns, and many of these concerns can be dealt with by talking over the phone or video conferencing with your health care provider. In the next 60-90 days, isolating from others is imperative. Remember, you can always call Dr. Bisbee on his cell phone for urgent questions.

Because of the increase incidence of COVID in Vermont and New England, we will not be scheduling face to face/ in office wellness exams and non-urgent medical visits at this time.

A 30-60 minute phone conversation can be scheduled which will cover many issues, and a brief physical exam can be scheduled later once the COVID surge is under control. 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.

Office Hours: The office is open 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM 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 influenza shot.

Staff are safe: Dr. Bisbee and his staff are tested for COVID 19 on a regular basis.

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? This gets a little confusing as the governor allows indoor dining with strict precautions but has discouraged groups of friends and family to congregate. They have discouraged families from different households from getting together for Christmas. We are all getting very tired of isolating. It is getting tricky to figure out how to socialize with friends and family, Mandates and recommendations change frequently and recently have become stricter.

Take a drive in the car, go outside and walk, weather permitting. Keep the 6 foot rule, (10 feet is even better). You can walk outside with a friend if you keep a distance of more than 6 feet. Most of this is common sense and unfortunately a significant percentage of Americans don't have it.