

COVID Update April 9, 2021

The vaccine roll-out continues to go well in the US, with 4 million doses administered one record setting day over Easter weekend, and the average daily doses given at over 3 million. S.C. announced the opening of 8 much needed vaccine centers in rural areas in Bamberg, Hampton and Allendale counties. Over 2 million vaccinations have been given in S.C, where vaccines are now available for everyone over the age of 16.

Meanwhile, around the world, poor countries struggle to obtain the vaccine and many have not yet even begun to vaccinate due to cost and lack of vaccine availability. A new vaccine, NVD-HXP-S is being tested in Brazil, Mexico, Thailand and Vietnam. It uses the same technology as flu vaccine mass production in chicken eggs. The early phases of study will not be completed until July but animal studies showed excellent antibody production from the vaccine injection in mice and hamsters. A nasal spray form is being tested as well.

Case surges continue in many parts of the US and seem to be driven by the B.1.1.7 variant, which is more contagious and causes more serious disease and is now disproportionately affecting younger individuals. This is thought to be due to relaxing of precautions, and to most older Americans being vaccinated now (54% of those over 65 are now fully vaccinated, and more than 75% have gotten one dose.) In New Jersey, which is seeing a B.1.1.7 surge, hospitalizations in those 20-29 years old increased 31%, and in the 40-49 year old group, increased 48%. Florida likewise has documented a marked increase in B.1.1.7 in 18-25 years old. Michigan experienced its highest daily new case number (8,400) since January. And locally, the spread of COVID-19 rose almost immediately after the City of Clemson relaxed mask rules in downtown bars, and students flocked to spring break destinations in March, according to ongoing wastewater studies. Between March 4 and March 23, the city saw more than a 2,000% increase in the virus' presence in wastewater, and 100% of it was B.1.1.7. Only continued use of masks and distancing will curb the spread of the variant until more of the population can be vaccinated.

Five states now account for almost half of new infections, with New York, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania and New Jersey together reported 44% of the nation's new COVID- 19 infections, or nearly 197,500 new cases, in the latest available seven-day period.

New cases of COVID-19 in the United States rose 5% to more than 450,000 last week, the third week in a row that infections have increased. Hospitalizations increased 4% as well, to more than 37,000 in the week ending April 4, breaking a streak of 11 weeks of falling admissions.

Studies are showing that the Pfizer vaccine prevents 90% of minor and asymptomatic COVID, so it should dramatically reduce spread of virus after vaccination, but continued mask wearing is recommended until more data is available and the pandemic is better controlled. Likewise, the CDC recently announced that people who are vaccinated can now travel at low risk to themselves, but continue to advise not to do so due to the high number of COVID cases still present in the population.

On Monday the CDC updated its guidance on cleaning of surfaces, advising that regular soap or detergent is adequate. Disinfection (with bleach or alcohol or other cleaners) is only required if a known or suspected COVID case has occurred in the environment in the past 24 hours. Fumigation, spraying, fogging and electrostatic are not needed in most cases and can actually carry their own risks.

The SC Department of Health and Environmental Control reported 641 new confirmed cases and seven new deaths statewide on Monday. The agency also reported 345 probable new cases with a 4.4% positivity rate. On Tuesday it reported 358 new confirmed cases, 179 probably new cases, and 0 new deaths statewide and 5.0% of tests were positive.

Greenville County had 104 new confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus. Greenville accounts for 10.2% of the state's population according to Census Bureau estimates, but it accounted for 16.2% of the confirmed cases reported Monday.