COVID Update 8/6/2021

In SC as of Thursday, only 2 counties are in the ‘moderate’ level of COVID incidence, the rest of the state is ‘high.’ Greenville County has 349 cases per 100k population in the two week cumulative average (up from single digit numbers the first week in July). The state documented 2,236 new cases on Aug 3, up from just 60 cases on June 20. The percentage of tests positive is 18.7% (a 5% or less rate is desirable.) Currently 44.9% of South Carolinians eligible are fully vaccinated.

The Biden White House contacted several major news agencies last week to decry the misleading headlines regarding breakthrough Delta COVID infections in vaccinated individuals, stating that the real story should be that, although the Delta variant can infect the vaccinated, the vaccine clearly is highly protective against severe illness and death.

On Saturday it was announced that when Broadway re-opens in the next few weeks, all attendees would be required to show proof of vaccination at the door, and to wear masks.

Mask mandates are being implemented by local governments throughout the US, due to ICUs overflowing with COVID patients and EMS systems being overwhelmed with 911 calls due to COVID. Cities include New Orleans, Kansas City, Birmingham, New York, and Louisville.

The University of SC on Friday updated its COVID-19 guidelines to require masks while indoors. On Tuesday that mandate was reversed when the SC Attorney General said it was illegal for a state school to issue a mask mandate.

On Thursday President Biden announced a plan to require all federal workers to attest their vaccination status. Unvaccinated individuals will be required to submit to regular COVID testing and will be barred from official travel.

The Justice Department recently ruled that employers can legally require COVID vaccination as a condition of employment. Several large private employers, including Google, FaceBook, Uber, Lyft, Disney, and Twitter, implemented that requirement. Meantime, many airlines as well as New York City are requiring vaccination of new hires.

On Sunday, Aug 1 2021, Florida broke the previous record for COVID hospitalizations, set July 23 2020, with 10,207 hospitalizations due to confirmed COVID infection. The increase has been marked by a startling increase in the number of young adults, and of pediatric patients, who are severely ill and requiring intensive care, including ventilators.

On Monday it was reported that the national COVID cases tripled in one month, at 1.3 million new infections in July.

On Monday it was reported that Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of state by state CDC data showed breakthrough COVID infections occur in vaccinated individuals less than 1% of the time (the range was 0.1% in Connecticut at the lowest, and 0.9% in Oklahoma at the highest.) 90% of cases, and over 95% of hospitalizations and deaths, have been in the unvaccinated. In most states, 98% of cases are in the unvaccinated.

The rate of vaccination has increased markedly. On Sunday, the US reported 816,203 dosesadministered – the fifth straight day recording more than 700,000 shots in arms. Also 58.1% of vaccine eligible Americans over age 12 are fully vaccinated.

Officials at the CDC, NIH and FDA have stated that all three currently available vaccines are highly effective against COVID and no booster is currently needed, but data continues to be accumulated and evaluated regularly.

Pfizer has completed its study of vaccination safety and efficacy, in smaller doses, down to age 5, and submitted the data to the FDA. Hopefully, the rollout of vaccinations for children age 5 and up will begin in September.

Several recent European publications suggest that incubation period for the Delta variant is a day or two shorter than for the alpha variant, and that infectivity lasts longer (18 days vs 13 days), which may lead to a change in quarantine recommendations soon. It also appears that Delta re-infection occurs more frequently than re-infection with earlier strains, but not until after 180 days. In good news, though, experts think the delta variant may have just 'burned itself out' in India and the UK, where cases dropped very quickly, more so than can be explained by vaccinations or mask wearing. This raises the possibility that the current Delta surge could be short lived in the U.S. as well, even if high level of vaccination cannot be achieved quickly

There is a new variant, 'lambda', detected by the Japanese who are doing genotype testing on specimens from all over the world, that has a mutation that makes it relatively vaccine resistant. Current vaccines are only about 50% effective against it. It arose in Peru, now makes up about 80% of cases there, and has also been found for the first time last week in the U.S., in Houston. It is present in 30 other countries, including the U.K. This makes physical measures (masking, distancing, hand hygiene) more important than ever.