

COVID Update October 20, 2021

In SC, COVID case numbers continue to decrease gradually, and that is a national trend as well, although there are numerous 'hotspots' in the US, mostly in the Midwest. New daily cases declined 27% in SC and the state now is down to 30th in the nation in new daily cases.

In Greenville County, incidence remains high, currently at 471 per 100k population over two weeks (greater than 200 is a high incidence). Five counties are down to 'moderate' levels (51-200 cases over two weeks per 100k population): McCormick, Calhoun, Colleton, Allendale and Jasper. The 7-day average of new daily cases in the upstate is now 390 as of 10/16, down from 725 on 10/5.

Vaccinations continue to increase slowly, with 54% of South Carolinians now fully vaccinated, and 61% having received at least one dose. Nationally, 189 million (57%) are fully vaccinated, and 219 million (66%) have received one dose. This includes the 8.8 million Americans who have received a third dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

The FDA advisory committee continues to review data to develop recommendations for boosting the Moderna and Johnson and Johnson vaccines. It has been reported that the official recommendation for Moderna is likely to be a half dose booster. The J & J vaccine immunity has waned more rapidly than the two dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and is boosted by doses of either of those, so recommendations may include the option to 'mix and match' boosters.

As of Tuesday October 5, nationally the coronavirus has killed 724,000 people and over 44,866,000 cases are confirmed.

Vaccine mandates have been controversial throughout the country, with some individuals opting to resign their employment rather than comply with an employer's requirement to become vaccinated. Several police unions are protesting. It has been reported that Delta airlines did not implement mandatory vaccination after the federal government required it for airline employees, and yet has 90% of its employees vaccinated. This has been touted as proof that the vaccine mandate is not needed. However, Delta ALREADY had a more stringent policy than the federal one, having implemented in August the requirement that employees be vaccinated, or get tested every week AND pay a \$200/month health insurance surcharge.

It was reported on Tuesday Oct 19 that studies have shown that 'hybrid immunity' from both having had COVID and receiving a vaccination, provides the best COVID protection. It is currently recommended that the vaccine be administered 90 days after COVID infection, but six months may be optimum. Vaccination provides better immunity than disease alone. COVID infection, like vaccination, provides less immunity in the very elderly and immunosuppressed, and mild disease with COVID provides lower natural immunity, as well.

Colin Powell's death on Monday Oct 18 of complications related to COVID infection, despite being fully vaccinated, raised questions in the media regarding vaccine efficacy. However, Powell was being treated for multiple myeloma, which placed him in the category of immune suppression in which all vaccines are known to be less effective. It is cases like this that make the case for vaccination of as much of the healthy population as possible, to lower the overall rate of disease and therefore the risk of illness in the immunosuppressed in whom the vaccine will not be fully protective.