May 12, 2021

ILLINOIS HEALTH AND HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Executive Officers, Member Hospitals and Health Systems
    Chief Operating Officers, Chief Medical Officers, Chief Nursing Officers,
    Chief Quality Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Emergency Preparedness Contacts,
    Emergency Department Directors, Behavioral Constituency Section,
    Government Relations Personnel, In-House Counsel, Public Relations Directors

FROM: A.J. Wilhelmi, President & CEO
      Tim Nuding, Senior Vice President, Member Services & Corporate Finance
      Keneatha Johnson, Senior Director, Quality, Safety and Health Policy

SUBJECT: IHA COVID-19 Update – May 12, 2021

Following is a brief recap of the most recent top developments.

Situational Awareness – Virus vs. Vaccine
The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced today 1,795 new confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases and 26 deaths. The total number of cases in the state is 1,359,748 with a total of 22,285 deaths. IDPH says that in the past 24 hours, 70,216 test specimens have been processed, with a positivity rate of 2.56%. The preliminary 7-day statewide positivity rate for cases as a percent of total tests from May 5-11 is 2.7%, and the 7-day test positivity rate is 3.3%. Statewide COVID-19 hospitalizations in the past 24 hours decreased from 1,930 patients to 1,899 patients. Of that figure, 466 were in the ICU, with 246 patients on ventilators.

A total of 10,110,969 vaccines have been administered in Illinois as of last midnight. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 80,591 doses. Yesterday, 73,345 doses were reported administered. A total of 4,607,114 Illinoisans are fully vaccinated representing 36% of the population.

National Hospitals Week: Thank You to Our Members
IHA honors hospitals and health systems across Illinois during National Hospital Week, which kicked off on May 9. Your dedication to caring for patients and communities has been nothing less than extraordinary during the past 16 months of the pandemic. Thank you for all you do.

To spotlight the critical role of hospitals, IHA produced this video featuring images of healthcare professionals and teams to represent the tireless response of all members during COVID-19. Please share the video link with your employees to show our gratitude and appreciation.

Pfizer Vaccine EUA Expanded to 12-15 Year Olds
On Monday, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) expanded the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine to include adolescents 12 through 15 years of age. The FDA has updated the Fact Sheets for Healthcare Providers Administering the Vaccine and for Recipients and Caregivers with information to reflect the use of the vaccine in the adolescent population, including the benefits and risks of the vaccine. This afternoon, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted to recommend the use of the vaccine in adolescents 12 to 15. The CDC director was expected to approve the recommendation later today. The CDC will hold a COCA call about this issue on Friday (May 14) at 1 p.m. CDT. Click here for details.

IDPH is implementing a strategy to bring vaccine closer to all patients, including school aged children. This strategy includes expanding vaccination efforts to doctors’ offices, as discussed in the next section, as well as encouraging schools to partner with community organizations, including hospitals, to match up students with vaccines. A letter outlining this part of the strategy was sent to all school superintendents this week.

**State Expanding Vaccination Efforts to Doctors’ Offices**
The state is continuing its efforts to make vaccines more accessible and available. Last Thursday, Governor Pritzker and IDPH announced that more than 1,000 doctors’ offices across the state have registered to administer the COVID-19 vaccine on site. The state is also urging pediatric offices to register with I-CARE to begin providing the vaccine to adolescents 12 to 15 years old (see enrollment packet at https://bit.ly/3us02E2). The city of Chicago, Cook County and many hospitals around the state plan to administer the vaccine to adolescents starting as soon as Thursday.

**State Launches Vaccinations for Office Building Workers**
To further expand convenient opportunities for Illinoisans to get vaccinated, Governor J.B. Pritzker announced on Monday the launch of a new program that offers building workers and returning office staff a chance to get their shot at work. The effort will start in mid-May with 10 sites in Chicago, Schaumburg and Rockford to reach front desk staff, custodial workers, security, building engineers and other employees.

**Monoclonal Antibody Treatment Update for Illinois Providers**
The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) and the Illinois Dept. of Public Health have issued an important notice to Illinois providers about monoclonal antibody treatments currently authorized for emergency use in certain patients for the treatment of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified that the P.1 variant (originally identified in Brazil) is circulating with increasing prevalence in Illinois. Data suggests that bamlanivimab and etesevimab are not active against the P.1 variant. Other authorized monoclonal antibody therapies, such as REGEN-COV, remain available and are expected to retain activity against this variant.

The Food and Drug Administration recommends that Illinois healthcare providers use alternative authorized monoclonal antibody therapies until further notice. ASPR will pause distribution of the bamlanivimab and etesevimab product as well as etesevimab alone to Illinois. All healthcare providers should monitor information from the CDC and state and local health authorities regarding the frequency of the P.1 variant in their region. For more information and questions: IDPH contact for monoclonal antibody therapy, ashley.thoele@illinois.gov; for therapeutic questions, COVID19Therapeutics@hhs.gov.

**CMS Increases Payments for Monoclonal Antibody Infusions**
As part of the ongoing response to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced last Thursday that it has increased the Medicare payment rate for administering monoclonal antibodies to treat beneficiaries with COVID-19, continuing coverage under the Medicare Part B COVID-19 vaccine benefit. Beneficiaries pay nothing out of pocket, regardless of where the service is furnished – including in a physician’s office, healthcare facility or at home. Effective May 6, the national average payment rate will increase from $310 to $450 for most healthcare settings. In support of providers’ efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, CMS will also establish a higher national payment rate of $750 when monoclonal antibodies are administered in the beneficiary’s home, including the beneficiary’s permanent residence or temporary lodging (e.g., hotel/motel, cruise ship, hostel, or homeless shelter).
CMS is updating the set of toolkits for providers, states and insurers to help the health care system swiftly administer monoclonal antibody treatment with these new Medicare payment rates at this webpage. In addition, CMS is updating coding resources for providers here.

IDPH Updates Medicaid COVID-19 Fee Schedule
The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services has posted an updated Medicaid COVID-19 Fee Schedule, which includes an addition for a laboratory service.

State Moving to “Bridge Phase” on Friday
Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced last week that on Friday, May 14, the state will move to the "Bridge Phase" of the “Restore Illinois Plan”, which will allow for higher capacity limits and increased business operations. Barring any setbacks (such as increases in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths), that means that the state could fully reopen -- in Phase 5 -- 28 days later on June 11.

IDPH Expands COVID-19 Testing to Middle/High Schools
IDPH today announced a $225 million investment to expand access to covidSHIELD testing to middle and high schools across the state at low or no cost. The covidSHIELD test, which was developed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, is a saliva-based test that quickly detects the virus that causes COVID-19, including in people who are not exhibiting symptoms.

IDPH says testing will help quickly identify individuals who are positive for COVID-19 so that people who are close contacts of that individual can be quarantined to prevent further spread. This could include exposure in school, sports, or other extra-curricular activities. The more quickly a case can be identified, the number of potential exposures to other people and the number of people needing to quarantine can be reduced.

CDC Updates Brief on Coronavirus Transmission
On Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an updated scientific brief on the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, warning that under certain conditions, the coronavirus can spread beyond six feet. The brief notes:

“Although infections through inhalation at distances greater than six feet from an infectious source are less likely than at closer distances, the phenomenon has been repeatedly documented under certain preventable circumstances. These transmission events have involved the presence of an infectious person exhaling virus indoors for an extended time (more than 15 minutes and in some cases hours) leading to virus concentrations in the air space sufficient to transmit infections to people more than 6 feet away, and in some cases to people who have passed through that space soon after the infectious person left.”

CDC also says “although how we understand transmission occurs has shifted, the ways to prevent infection with this virus have not. All prevention measures that CDC recommends remain effective for these forms of transmission.”

Resources

- IDPH COVID-19 webpage and Coronavirus.illinois.gov
- CDC Homepage for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- Chicago Department of Public Health COVID-19 webpage
- IHA webpage on COVID-19

If you have questions or comments, please contact Tim Nuding, Senior Vice President, Member Services and Corporate Finance at 217-541-1164 or tnuding@team-iha.org.