

February 12, 2021

Message to Duncaster Residents and Families

Michael A. O'Brien, President and CEO

There is reason to be encouraged by Connecticut's declining positivity and hospitalization rates along with the increased availability of COVID-19 vaccines. Key metrics we have been following throughout the pandemic have fallen to levels not seen since the fall. While this news offers hope for a transition to "normalcy", the decline in cases began prior to vaccination so it is not attributable solely to vaccines. In addition, we don't yet know if vaccines prevent transmission. What we do know is that it prevents people from getting sick, but it is possible that a person who has been vaccinated can transmit the virus to others. And it is too early to know if the vaccines protect against the variants.

Vaccination Clinics

Last weekend we conducted two very successful vaccination clinics. As a result we have now administered a total of 985 doses to residents, staff and contractors. We have conducted three clinics at the Caleb Hitchcock Health Center and two at the Main Building. A third clinic at the Main Building will be held on February 27th for any resident, staff member or contractor who received their first vaccine last weekend. By the 27th all but two of our Independent Living residents and approximately 52% of our staff across all levels of the community will have received both vaccine doses. All Assisted Living and Caleb Hitchcock Health Center residents have now received both doses of the vaccine.

Now that residents and staff have received the second dose of the vaccine many have been asking "Does this mean I am free to go about life as we did before the pandemic once my immunity kicks in?" Sadly, the answer is no. There are still safety precautions we will need to follow in order to keep safe and protected from COVID-19. It is important to understand why and the following is what leading medical experts are saying.

1) The vaccine is not 100% protection. Even the best of the currently available vaccines only offer up to 95% protection when you are fully immunized. That means there still is a 5% chance you can catch coronavirus at any time. Remember, it can take two to three weeks after you get the second shot before your immunity fully kicks in.

2) Everyone is different. Some people are going to mount more robust immune responses to both rounds of the COVID-19 vaccination than others.

3) A moving target. As is typical with viruses, the COVID-19 virus is mutating around the world creating variants that are proving to be more contagious than those the US is currently battling. Experts are already warning that antibodies from a prior case of COVID-19 won't protect against being reinfected with a variant from South Africa. There is also a possibility that the current vaccines won't fully protect against the new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. That's being studied feverishly right now, so stay tuned.

4) You could be a silent spreader. "We don't yet know whether being vaccinated means that you're no longer a carrier of coronavirus. That is, fully immunized people may still be able to spread COVID-19 to others. It's possible that someone could get the vaccine but could still be an

asymptomatic carrier. They may not show symptoms, but they have the virus in their nasal passageway so that if they're speaking, breathing, sneezing and so on, they can still transmit it to others." said CNN Medical Analyst Dr. Leana Wen, an emergency physician and visiting professor at George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health.

5) Will immunity last? Researchers don't yet know just how long the immunity given by the current vaccines will last. There is a possibility that booster doses may be needed in the months or years to come. That's not uncommon, adults need tetanus and diphtheria boosters every 10 years. So until more is known about how long the protection lasts and against which variants stay safe and protect others by wearing a mask.

Community Activities

At this time we are currently open to what we call "individual" activities where one can be socially distant and low risk for spreading or acquiring COVID-19, specifically the mail room, library, woodworking shop, outpatient physical therapy, salon and the fitness center. While we are all eager to fully "re-open" we will continue to do so in a slow and cautious manner. February 20, 2021 is 14-days post our second COVID vaccination, the date we are aiming towards as our second wave of re-opening, if we remain virus free.

Testing

A non-clinical staff member at Caleb Hitchcock Health Center tested positive from this week's testing. The employee is now quarantining at home and all appropriate contact tracing has been conducted including rapid tests as indicated. I am happy to report that no other staff or resident was deemed to be at high exposure risk and that the employee is asymptomatic and doing well. As required by DPH regulation, we are now considered back in outbreak mode, having had one staff test positive. The implications of this are that we will need to suspend indoor visitation at the Caleb Hitchcock Health Center until we achieve 14 days of no positive staff or residents. Please know that this is a temporary halt, and as soon as we reach the 14-day mark, we will reopen indoor visitations. Scheduled compassionate care visits for your loved one will still continue. In addition, we will need to resume testing all Caleb Hitchcock Health Center residents weekly until we achieve 14 days of no staff or residents testing positive. At this time staff are still required to test weekly at least until the end of April. We are awaiting more guidance from DPH related to the implications of the vaccine administration in terms of Caleb Hitchcock Health Center reopening and group activities. All other Duncaster residents and staff, Main Building and Caleb Hitchcock Health Center, tested negative this week.

In closing, we have all benefited throughout the pandemic from the wise counsel from Duncaster resident Larry Rothfield MD, retired Professor of Molecular Biology and Biophysics at the UCONN Medical School and Head of the Department of Microbiology. Dr. Rothfield reminds all of us that "Even when the full protective effect of the vaccine is achieved it will not be 100% effective. For example a vaccinated individual will likely be protected against low to moderate amounts of virus but still susceptible to infection if larger amounts are inhaled. Therefore, it will be essential that we continue to adhere to all the recommended precautions, especially proper use of masks, until COVID infections have essentially disappeared from the community. So remember, there IS light at the end of the tunnel and it would be a shame to let down our guard when we are so close to the finish line."

Be well and be safe.