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Wellness Through Answers News

May/June 2021

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to
Reliable Health Information*



The CDC's latest **mask guidance** comes just in time for summer. Fully vaccinated adults and children 12 and older can now forgo masks outdoors and in most indoor settings. The FDA anticipates a pediatric COVID vaccine approval in September. Until then, families with younger children must weigh the effects of continued social isolation against the risks of catching COVID with outdoor and indoor activities. The American Academy of Pediatrics **recommends** unvaccinated children continue to mask in crowded public places. Children can forgo masks for small gatherings of fully vaccinated family members and friends, water sports, or activities in which face masks could pose a safety risk. For families planning summer vacations, the *New York Times* **survey of health experts** offers more guidance.

Vaccine News

- Cancer patients show a good COVID **immune response** to the vaccine
- New York issues **vaccine passports** to those vaccinated in the state
- **Russia** begins vaccinating pets for COVID

- Some **prescription drugs** may reduce the effectiveness of COVID vaccines
- Moderna's vaccine **works in teens**
- **Mix-and-match** COVID vaccines trigger a strong immune response
- Reports of **myocarditis** in teens and young adults after COVID vaccination
- The **Dirty dozen** of vaccine disinformation
- Human antibodies **target many parts** of the COVID virus spike protein
- Pfizer vaccine can be stored longer at **warmer temperatures**
- A store clerk or employer who asks you about your vaccination status **has not violated HIPAA**

COVID-19 Updates

- CDC updates **summer camp** guidance
- **Mild asymptomatic** COVID-19 cases may be as infectious as severe cases
- Two-thirds of unvaccinated adults believe or are unsure about common COVID-19 **vaccine myths**
- Almost all children hospitalized with multi-organ inflammatory syndrome recovered by **six months**
- What science says about **lifting mask mandates**
- What are the **risks of spreading** COVID for the fully vaccinated?
- People with **weakened immune systems** should continue to wear masks
- A large study finds **convalescent plasma** does not benefit hospitalized COVID patients
- **Aerosols** versus droplets in COVID transmission
- Consumers turn to FDA-approved **air filtration devices** to battle the virus
- First COVID **treatment ads** hit the airwaves

Who Are the Vaccine Holdouts?

Sixty percent of Americans are fully vaccinated or partially vaccinated against COVID. To reach the President's July 1 goal of 70% of Americans with at least one shot, many more people have to step up. Who are the people who do not want to be vaccinated? The nonprofit data analytics firm, Surgo Ventures, identified **four** holdout groups in a **national survey**:

- Watchful - are waiting to see what happens next
- Cost-anxious - want the vaccine but cannot take time off to get it
- System-distrusters - feel the healthcare system treats them unfairly
- COVID skeptics - believe conspiracy theories that the virus is a hoax or does not pose a threat

These groups include people from every political, racial, economic, and age group. The data Surgo gathered may help public health officials craft vaccine messages that effectively target each group.

What can you say to eligible, unvaccinated adults in your social circles? Persuasive techniques like commanding, advising, lecturing, and shaming do not work. Two physicians created a **chatbot** to help us encourage friends to get vaccinated. The chatbot uses the principles of motivational interviewing to harness a patient's innate desire to change.

Masks and Filtration Systems Improve School Safety

New York City, the nation's largest school district, will revert to in-person only classes this fall. Will most public school systems do away with remote learning options? Parents of unvaccinated children may worry about the safety of in-person learning.

A **new CDC report** found mask requirements for teachers and staff and improved ventilation lowered COVID cases. The incidence of COVID was 37% lower in schools with mask mandates and 39% lower in schools that improved ventilation. Effective ventilation strategies included dilution methods alone (35% lower incidence) or in combination with filtration methods (48% lower incidence).

Federal COVID relief funds will offer communities an unprecedented opportunity to improve the health of school buildings through infrastructure changes. Experts, however, are concerned communities will waste money on inappropriate, unproven, or ineffective technologies. The **LANCET COVID-19 Commission Task Force on Safe Work, Safe School, and Safe Travel** offers communities prudent, science-based strategies for updating the health of school buildings. The report's authors advise communities to:

- Assess existing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to make sure they work as designed
- Ventilate with clean outdoor air to dilute the concentration of airborne virus
- Use portable air cleaners with high-efficiency particulate air filtration if needed
- Based on existing strategies, consider the need for additional air cleaning technologies like in-duct, germicidal UV-lights

There are more **resources** for combatting airborne infectious diseases on the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers

website.

Benzene Detected in Popular Sun Protection Products

Valisure LLC, an independent drug and health products testing lab, **found benzene** in many popular brands of sunscreen and after-sun skincare products. Benzene is an industrial chemical **linked to blood cancers** like leukemia. The **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** suggests benzene is not safe at any level. More worrisome, the **Canadian Bureau of Chemical Safety showed** that sunscreen application specifically increased the rate of benzene absorption through the skin.

Valisure **petitioned the FDA** to recall the contaminated batches of sunscreen and after-sun products and asked for clarification around allowable levels of benzene in these products. Consumers can send sunscreen to Valisure for free analysis as part of the company's Crowdsourcing Study.

Consumers can see a list of sunscreens and after-sun products **without benzene** and a list of products **with benzene** from the company website. Valisure reminds consumers not all sunscreens contain benzene, and sunscreen protects against harmful ultraviolet radiation, which causes skin cancer.

Do You Need That Treatment?

The US healthcare system favors treatment over prevention. This approach is costly and often exposes patients to drugs and procedures they do not need and might harm them. Physicians estimated **20% of overall medical care is unnecessary**. Why do physicians order services patients don't need? There are **financial incentives** for prescribing drugs, ordering tests, and scheduling surgeries.

How can you tell whether you need a recommended medical service? Experts recommend asking a few questions:

- How will this test or treatment help me?
- What are the pros and cons of this drug, procedure, or surgery?
- What are my alternatives?

- Do I need this test or treatment right now?

If you are unsatisfied with your physician's answers, you can get a second opinion.

Here are additional resources for patients questioning a new service:

- The American Board of Medicine Foundation **Choosing Wisely** program identifies 245 tests and procedures patients and their healthcare providers should question.
- The Lown Institute **Hospitals Index** ranks hospitals based on how many unnecessary procedures they perform. These include hysterectomy for benign disease, coronary stents for stable heart disease, and head imaging for fainting.
- The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's "**Questions are the Answer**" program includes questions to ask physicians, tips on talking to physicians, and a "Question Builder" app.

Colon Cancer Screening Should Start Sooner

Routine colon cancer screening should now begin at 45, says the **U.S Preventive Services Taskforce**, an independent, volunteer panel of physicians who recommend preventive health practices. Current guidelines recommend routine screenings begin at age 50. Why the change? Rates of colon cancer have **increased in younger Americans**, particularly among Blacks who are **more likely to die** from the disease than non-Hispanic whites. Colon cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in men and women in the U.S. Early screening, however, makes this cancer highly preventable.

The Taskforce recommends two types of screening tests: "direct visualization tests" like colonoscopies and stool-based tests. After the initial screening, they recommend colonoscopies every ten years and stool tests every one to three years.

Are Birth Centers as Safe as Hospitals?

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) says hospitals and accredited free-standing birthing centers **are the safest places to deliver a baby**. New research presented at the ACOG annual scientific meeting disputes their position.

Researchers compared **newborn safety outcomes** for planned at-home births, accredited free-standing birth centers, and hospitals. They evaluated data for over nine million women, 75% were 24-35 years old, and over 50% were non-Hispanic white.

Newborn death rates were highest for at-home births. Babies delivered at birth centers were four times more likely to die, have lower Apgar scores, and more likely to have seizures than babies at hospitals.

Based on their findings, researchers urged ACOG to change its position on birth centers.

More News and Resources You Can Use

- "**Unlonely Film Festival**" offers films to inspire, enlighten, elevate and inform
- **Connecticut Parentage Act** provides equal treatment under the law to children born to LGBTQ parents
- Twenty tips to **fall asleep** faster
- A **new report** says the tobacco industry targets women and girls with predatory marketing
- Antidepressants **do not reduce** back pain or arthritis pain
- Services for people with **vision loss**
- **Ancient grains** are nutritional powerhouses
- The right way to **apologize**
- We **remember more** when we read print materials
- Resources for planting a **sustainable garden**
- Best **meditation apps** for all budgets
- Trouble **managing money** may be an early sign of dementia
- Social Security's '**Extra Help**' program covers up to \$5000 of prescription drug costs

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

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