

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL BRIEFING BY UF HEALTH JACKSONVILLE**

**COVID-19-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Remote meeting via teleconference**

**September 7, 2021**

**10:00 a.m.**

**Location:** Remote meeting via teleconference

**In attendance:** Council President Sam Newby (other council members may have been present but not identified on the conference call)

State Senator Audrey Gibson; State Representatives Wyman Duggan and Tracie Davis; School Board Member Lori Hershey; Jeff Clements– Council Research Division; Russ Armistead, Aaron Bean, Dr. David Caro, Dr. Mobine Rathor - UF Health Jacksonville

**Meeting Convened**: 9:01 a.m.

Sen. Aaron Bean moderated the call, opened by thanking the participants for joining, and introduced Russ Armistead, UF Health’s new CEO. Mr. Armistead reported that the UF Health emergency coordinating team had been meeting daily for 18 consecutive months until finally taking a break and not meeting for 2 days during the Labor Day weekend. UF Health’s two hospitals currently have 127 hospitalized COVID cases, which is unchanged for the last 5-6 days after peaking at 274 hospitalized cases on August 10th. The hospitals have added 100 beds to their total capacity by converting private rooms to shared rooms and converting other types of spaces. The system is providing monoclonal antibody infusions at several locations. The system currently has 44 COVID patients in the intensive care units (75% of ICU capacity). The average length of hospitalization for COVID patients is 9 days for non-ICU cases and 14 days for ICU patients. 75% of those currently in the hospital have not been vaccinated. The hospital is limiting visitors to minimize exposure and possible infections and is limiting elective surgery due to space and resource limitations. UF Health is not mandating vaccination for its employees, but is requiring more stringent masking standards for those who either are not vaccinated or decline to voluntarily disclose their vaccination status. Mr. Armistead said COVID cases are leveling off but not declining, and everyone is hopeful that there will not be a COVID surge after holiday weekend gatherings.

Dr. Mobine Rathor, a pediatric infectious disease expert working at both UF Health and Wolfson Children’s Hospital said that most, if not all cases, current COVID cases in Northeast Florida are the Delta variant, which is very infectious. More children getting the virus and getting sick, some are in the ICU and being ventilated, and some do die. He said that in May and June there was 1 juvenile death per month from COVID; in the last 2 months that has risen to 2 deaths per month. Children under 12 are not eligible for the vaccine and therefore are at high risk. There were 1,960 positive cases in Duval County public schools in the first few weeks since the resumption of classes. He said it is very important for children age 12+ to get vaccinated, and he understands that the FDA may approve a vaccine for children under age 12 by the end of this year. Vaccines are safe, and the side effects are typically mild and worth the risk. Children get the same symptoms as adults. Multi-inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) is a serious risk from COVID infections, often showing up several weeks after initial infection. So-called “Long COVID” (symptoms lasting weeks or months after initial infection) is a risk that young people would have to live with for the rest of their lives; symptoms can include inability to think or concentrate (“brain fog”), heart palpitations, fatigue, chest pain, cough). If everyone follows the rules of the road and takes proper precautions, we’re all safer than if some refuse and pose a danger to the rest of us.

Dr. David Caro, Disaster Medical Officer for UF Health, said there is a downturn in overall COVID case numbers but increase in pediatric cases, and ICU case numbers are high. The Pfizer vaccine has been fully FDA approved and all the vaccines are very safe and effective at preventing bad illness. UF Health has been doing vaccine rallies in honor of the late Dr. Leon Haley and has provided 21,500 full series vaccinations to date. The hospital is in a good place with ventilators and ICU support equipment at present and is slowly starting to bring surgeries back online if ICU space continues to remain available. He said that 57 UF Health employees on COVID quarantine, half of which are clinical workers. Dr. Caro announced a website giving information for home care for persons with COVID positive cases - [www.covidhome.care](http://www.covidhome.care). That site shows a Centers for Disease Control video of what to do and how to stay safe.

Questions and Answers

An email question asked about what the current models say about the future of the virus. Dr. Karo said predictive modeling worked for the first couple of waves when social restrictions were uniform around the country, but modeling is getting harder lately because of non-uniformity around the country. The best current models are using data from other countries (UK, India).

School Board member Lori Hershey asked if children are on ventilators and about the difference between current technology and the iron lung in the era of polio. Dr. Rathore said there are children on ventilators now, and really serious cases need heart/lung machines. Ventilators work differently from the iron lung.

A texted question asked about monoclonal antibody treatment. Dr. Karo said UF Health does offer monoclonal antibody treatment at several UF Health clinics and the main hospital. Dr. Rathore reiterated that prevention is more important that treatment after infection. Monoclonal antibody treatment is available to children age 12 and over and can be used for prophylactic use after exposure. He recommended the www.fcaap.org website for more information.

Mr. Bean announced that the next conference call will be on October 7th at 10 a.m.

Mr. Armistead said that full vaccination is the only way to get out of this pandemic; the Delta variant is extremely contagious so please wear a mask, social distance, wash hands frequently.

Meeting Adjourned 11:30 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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