



Department of Health

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Dear Colleagues:

We continue to see steady progress in our fight against COVID-19 here in New York State. Earlier this month, we achieved a tremendous milestone. Over 70 percent of all New Yorkers age 18+ have now received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine – nearly three weeks ahead of the goal set by the Biden administration. In just six short months, over 21 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have now been administered statewide. It is in large part because of our vaccination program's success that New York State continues to set the example for the nation. After once having the highest COVID-19 positivity rate in the world, at 48.16 percent, we now have a seven-day average positivity rate of 0.4 percent – among the lowest in the United States. And now we have reached a second milestone with the Governor's announcement that the state of emergency in New York first declared on March 7, 2020 has finally come to an end.

We have substantial real-world evidence that vaccination is effective at preventing COVID-19, even against variants of concern. A [recent study](#) published in *Nature* found that while the neutralizing antibody response of Johnson & Johnson's Ad26.CO2.S vaccine was lower against the B.1.351 (Beta) and P.1 (Gamma) variants of concern, compared with the original strain, functional non-neutralizing antibody responses as well as CD8+ and CD4+ T cell responses were preserved against these variants. Another recent [analysis](#) from *Public Health England* showed that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is 96% effective against hospitalization from the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant. These positive findings mirror results from similar studies of currently-authorized vaccines against other variants of concern.

In addition to making COVID-19 vaccines as accessible as possible and encouraging all eligible New Yorkers to get vaccinated, the Department of Health continues to closely monitor reported cases of adverse events, including myocarditis and pericarditis. Between February 12 and June 18, 2021, we have received reports of 38 cases of myocarditis, 30 cases of pericarditis, and 25 cases of myopericarditis in New York State, as reported through the VAERS system. 23 of the 38 reports of myocarditis occurred in individuals 24 and under. The CDC's [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#) (ACIP) discussed these cases during their June 23 meeting to understand more about these conditions. The committee concluded that the benefits of mRNA vaccination against COVID-19 still clearly outweigh the risks related to myocarditis and pericarditis in all ages and sexes examined. The CDC's [Clinical Considerations for COVID-19 Vaccination](#) guidance for providers is being updated to include more information on cases of myocarditis and pericarditis as well.

During their discussion of additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine, ACIP did not make any recommendations on the necessity of booster doses, pending release of additional data expected later this summer and fall. After the conclusion of the ACIP meeting, I met with New York State's Clinical Advisory Task Force, who agreed with the ACIP's conclusions. The Department of Health will continue to keep all providers in New York State informed and prepared for any future developments in the program.

While our statewide trajectory remains positive, it does not mean our responsibility to protect all New Yorkers from COVID-19 has been fulfilled. As New York State commemorates Juneteenth, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on its significance and reaffirm New York's commitment to health equity and combatting structural racism. I would also like to discuss our responsibility to protect the health of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, as we celebrate Pride month.

New York State is committed to achieving health equity and addressing the effect of history regarding racism-inspired laws, policies, and other institutional structures. The consequences of these actions to limit the health of Black Americans are still with us. Data show that Black and Indigenous people, as well as other people of color, in New York State live shorter lives and are [affected at disproportionate rates](#) by numerous health conditions compared with their white counterparts.

Unfortunately, we saw the same pattern with COVID-19, whereby limited access to care compromised their health. Vulnerable communities, especially in urban areas, have been [impacted by COVID-19 at higher rates](#). Health care and public health practitioners are well positioned to tackle these health issues. The Department of Health has published tools and frameworks including [Health Equity Competencies for Health Care Providers](#), which presents clinicians with tools for promoting health equity in health care settings.

As this relates to our New York State vaccination program, we established a Vaccine Equity Task Force last December to shape our vaccination efforts in a way that reduces disparities. New York has also established dozens of pop-up vaccination clinics at a variety of nontraditional locations including houses of worship, community centers, public housing, transit hubs, and other places to ensure that all New Yorkers can protect themselves from COVID-19. Equity will remain a cornerstone of our vaccine rollout as well as our overall COVID-19 response and other departmental strategies.

We are also tackling disparities affecting the LGBTQ+ community and engaging in efforts to overcome the threats to mental and physical well-being they face. It is especially important for all health care professionals to keep this issue front and center regarding inequities for LGBTQ+ people of color, especially Black and Latinx trans individuals, who are all too often most at risk of experiencing discrimination.

Our AIDS Institute comprehensively addresses the intersections of LGBTQ+ Health and Human Service programs, services and HIV/STD/HCV prevention, care and treatment. The core initiative of the Office of LGBTQ Services is to provide health and human services and support across the lifespan, including reducing stigma and increasing the number of providers in New York State trained to provide culturally responsive care to the LGBTQ+ community.

Thank you for your continued work to help us end this pandemic once and for all, and for everything you do to protect and improve the health of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Howard".

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health