Today's COVID-19 stats from BJH

32 inpatients confirmed positive       3 admitted, awaiting test results

Thank you for continuing to follow safety measures

WashU Med employees and students are doing their part to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by following safety measures even after being vaccinated. The Medical Campus has reported very low numbers of positive cases and persons under investigation (PUI) in the past week.
Area hospitals focus on seniors, high-risk individuals as state schedules next phase

Missouri will move to the next phase of its COVID-19 vaccination plan on March 15, making approximately 550,000 more residents eligible to receive a vaccine. Phase 1B – Tier 3 comprises essential workers, including teachers. However, significant progress must still be made toward completing Phase 1B – Tier 2 before St. Louis health-care systems will be prepared to begin vaccinating the next tier. Phase 1B – Tier 2 includes individuals ages 65 and above, and individuals between 16-65 with underlying health conditions that predispose them to complications or death from COVID-19.

For more information about vaccine eligibility, visit the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services website.

FDA approves use of first single-dose COVID-19 vaccine
The FDA has granted Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for a single-dose vaccine found to be effective and safe in protecting against COVID-19. The EUA clears the way for the vaccine, manufactured by Johnson & Johnson, to be administered in the U.S. to individuals 18 years of age and older. Nearly four million doses are now being shipped nationwide.

Missouri health officials expect to receive 50,000 doses this week. Rachel Presti, MD, PhD, associate professor of medicine and medical director of the Infectious Diseases Clinical Research Unit, led a phase 3 clinical trial evaluating the vaccine at WashU Med.

"We're very hopeful that it's going to be a game-changer," Presti said in a recent article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Study seeks to understand serious complications of COVID-19 in children
WashU Med pediatric specialists are part of a major research effort aimed at understanding the extent to which children and young adults develop serious complications of COVID-19, including multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C).

Charles Canter, MD, professor of pediatrics and the Lois B. Tuttle and Jeanne B. Hauck Chair in Pediatric Cardiology, is leading the clinical trial at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, one of 20 sites in the study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. He says that although MIS-C is rare, it’s also unpredictable and can strike children who were healthy just a few weeks before. “The aim of this study is to understand what drives the development of MIS-C and severe COVID-19 in children so we can identify those who are at risk and determine the best way to treat them,” Canter said.

New evidence COVID-19 antibodies, vaccines less effective against variants
New research at WashU Med indicates that COVID-19 variants are partly resistant to antibodies that work against the original virus. The findings, published today in Nature Medicine, suggest that drugs and vaccines developed thus far may become less effective as the variants become dominant.

Senior author Michael Diamond, MD, PhD, the Herbert S. Gasser Professor of Medicine, says people who produce very high levels of antibodies would still likely be protected against the variants, while those with a weaker immune response — especially older and immunocompromised people — may be more vulnerable. “If the level of antibody needed for protection goes up tenfold, as our data indicate it does, they may not have enough,” Diamond said. “The concern is that the people who need protection the most are the ones least likely to have it.”

COVID-19 can kill heart muscle cells, interfere with contraction

A new WashU Med study provides evidence that COVID-19 patients’ heart damage is caused by the virus invading and replicating inside heart muscle cells, leading to cell death and interfering with heart muscle contraction. The study is published Feb. 26 in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology: Basic to Translational Science.
From the pandemic's onset, cardiologists have been alarmed by the virus' ability to cause heart failure or cardiac injury in generally healthy people. It was unclear whether this was due to a direct infection of the heart or a systemic inflammatory response to infection. “Our study is unique because it definitively shows that, in patients with COVID-19 who developed heart failure, the virus infects the heart, specifically heart muscle cells,” said senior author Kory Lavine, MD, PhD, associate professor of medicine.

Volunteers with Epic experience needed at vaccine clinics

BJC HealthCare’s public vaccination clinics are in need of volunteers with Epic experience — including both clinical and non-clinical staff — as the number of sites continues to grow. The new clinic in Wentzville, opened last Saturday, administered more than 1,700 first-dose vaccinations over the weekend. BJC, in conjunction with WashU Med, continues to provide vaccinations through public clinics at the Medical Campus, Christian Hospital and Memorial Hospital Belleville; as well as through medical offices in Farmington, Sullivan and Alton. An additional site will open in Ellisville on March 6.
WashU Med faculty addresses vaccine infertility myths

In a recent KMOV story, Kenan Omurtag, MD, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, dispels a number of myths about infertility and the first two COVID-19 vaccines. According to Omurtag, there is simply no evidence to suggest the COVID-19 vaccines produced by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna will cause any fertility issues. "There was this rumor that the spike protein that the vaccine builds immunity to COVID-19 looks similar to placenta protein," he said. "So the myth comes from 'Oh, if they look similar enough, the body won't be able to tell the difference and will mount an immune response not only to protect you against the spike protein for a COVID infection, but it will also build an immune response against the placenta.' And that is not true."

Safety signage available to download
Thanks to a collective effort, WashU Med continues to have very low numbers of employee and student cases of COVID-19. Help spread the message! A series of safety signage, including some specifically for labs, is available to download in Box.

Important numbers and links
Call the BJC/WashU Med employee hotline for COVID-19 exposure or illness: 314-362-5056

Use this online screening tool before reporting to work

Know your screening stations

Review inpatient protocol

Review ambulatory protocol

Contact the Employee Assistance Program for 24/7 work-life support: 844-365-4587

View WashU Med employee and student testing data

Email story ideas and requests to heroes@wustl.edu

For Medical Campus updates, visit covid19.med.wustl.edu »

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